

The Tragedy of Philosophy

Kant's *Critique of Judgment* and the Project of Aesthetics

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Andrew Cooper

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The Tragedy of Philosophy

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Kant's *Critique of Judgment* and the Project of Aesthetics

Andrew Cooper

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. . . nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future.

—Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*

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Preface

To consider Kant as a thinker of tragedy is to embark on a controversial project. My aim in this book is to contribute to the growing interest in a side of Kant that has often been overlooked, namely, his sensitivity to humanity as an organic form of being—as a *part of* nature—endowed with the visceral capacity for feeling pleasure and displeasure that, on a level that precedes cognition, promotes the continuity of life. In *Critique of Judgment*, the capacity for feeling pleasure and displeasure constitutes a bridge between the two facets of experience that permeate Kant's work: the experience of nature as an already constituted region of causality, and of ourselves as moral, free beings. The need for this project became apparent to me somewhat tangentially as I discovered the burgeoning philosophical literature on Greek tragedy. This literature suggests that the paradigm of nature often assumed in philosophy and the natural sciences misconstrues the natural sphere as a domain that can be mastered by human knowledge. It searches for a more complex and multifaceted paradigm of nature in the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides and the subsequent tradition in philosophy inspired by their work.

What was of particular interest to me in this literature is that it attempts to salvage a dynamic picture of nature from within philosophy itself; that is, from a tragedy that is specific to philosophical inquiry, or *The Tragedy of Philosophy*, as I refer to in the title of this book. It considers the work of Kant, and his presentation of an impassable barrier between nature's order and human spontaneity, as expressive of philosophy's systematic attempt to hold the fixity of metaphysics apart from organic vitality. From this point the literature bifurcates: one side argues that Kant's presentation of this barrier opens his successors to the task of reconciling the duality of human experience in a single picture of nature; the other claims that Kant's failed attempt to salvage philosophy reveals that philosophy

itself must be abandoned in favor of the mode of thinking expressed by the ancient tragedians, one attuned to particularity and difference.

While I share the conviction that we require an expansive picture of nature capable of holding human spontaneity in genuine union with natural events, I begin by arguing that these representations of Kant misread the relation between philosophy and tragedy. This is not least for the reason that they portray tragedy as a form of presentation that is, for philosophy's contemporary concern, lifeless and dead. My aim is thus to provide an alternative representation of Kant that highlights the organic relation between tragedy and philosophy. Building from Kant's acknowledgment of the failures of philosophy in the eighteenth century, I claim that tragedy is an ongoing problematic in philosophy that opens an experience of nature in union with human spontaneity. Thus understood, Kant's *Critique of Judgment* represents a sustained engagement with the tragedy of philosophy; my aim is to show that this engagement is not surpassed but rather extended in the work of philosophers who continue the project of aesthetics.

I received a great deal of support in developing this project. I am particularly grateful to my doctoral supervisors John Grumley and Vrasidas Karalis, who helped me to see research in the history of philosophy as a creative engagement with the present. Countless hours spent in conversation with Vras taught me to embrace the specificity of human life over and against theorization, particularly when it comes to tragedy. I would also like to thank those who patiently read the manuscript and provided invaluable comments, including Paul Redding, Dennis Schmidt, Richard Eldridge, Jonathan Dunk, and Yarran Hominh. I am grateful for the time and effort they put into my writing, and I hope they feel that the book is greatly improved as a result. To Denny in particular, your belief in my work means more to me than I can say. I received encouragement from many others at key stages of this project, including Simon Critchley, Jeff Malpas, Julian Young, and Nathan Lyons. Their contributions have added considerable depth and clarity to my work. I am also thankful for the reports provided by my anonymous reviewers, which offered insightful suggestions I have attempted to include in the book. At SUNY Press Andrew Kenyon has been an incredibly efficient editor and a constant source of support, and Emily Keneston has been equally helpful in seeing the book through its various stages to production. My thanks go also to Markus Gabriel, for hosting me in the lively philosophy faculty at the University of Bonn during the final stages of writing. And this project would not have been possible at all without the financial support of several generous sources, including

the Australian government, the University of Sydney, St Paul's College, and the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD).

Perhaps the greatest source of inspiration for this book came from the lives and stories of homeless young people in Sydney with whom I have worked during the past eight years. It was through conversations with homeless youth that I became interested in the idea of tragedy as a way of framing the competing demands of human experience. And it was through these conversations that I became discontent with theories of tragedy that end in the satisfaction of the spectator rather than in action. The remarkable courage of homeless youth taught me that freedom does not lie beyond our material conditions, but within them. Many thanks go to them, and to the team at The Bridge Youth Refuge, for giving me the opportunity to learn that effective practice begins with discovering one's own homelessness.

A portion of the introduction appeared previously in a slightly different form as "Philosophy's Tragedy," *Metaphilosophy* 47 (2016): 59–74.

Note on Citations

Citations to Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Critique of Judgment* are to volume 5 of *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, Akademie Ausgabe. Citations to the *Critique of Pure Reason* are to the customary A/B page numbers from the first and second editions. Translations quoted are from the Cambridge University Press editions unless otherwise stated.

Citations of the Greek tragedies are from *The Complete Greek Drama*, two volumes, edited by Whitney Oates and Eugene O'Neil, unless otherwise stated and use the standard line numbering system. Citations to Aristotle are taken from *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, two volumes, edited by Jonathan Barnes, and use the standard marginal key from Immanuel Bekker's 1831 edition of the Greek text. Citations to other texts are by page number. Modifications made to translations are noted in endnotes in the text.

Abbreviations of frequently cited works are as follows. For these texts, page numbers are cited parenthetically and bibliographical details are given in the back matter.

Benjamin

GT *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*

Castoriadis

CL *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*

IIS *The Imaginary Institution of Society*

Hegel

EL *Encyclopaedia Logic*

FK *Faith and Knowledge*

LA *Lectures on Aesthetics*
PS *Phenomenology of Spirit*

Heidegger

B&T *Being and Time*
GA *Gesamtausgabe*
HH Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"
IM *Introduction to Metaphysics*
RA "The Self-Assertion of the German University" (Rector's Address)

Jaspers

TNE *Tragedy Is Not Enough*

Kant

APV *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*
CJ *Critique of Judgment*
CPrR *Critique of Practical Reason*
CPR *Critique of Pure Reason*

Nietzsche

BT *The Birth of Tragedy*
TI *Twilight of the Idols*

Rosenzweig

SR *The Star of Redemption*

Schopenhauer

WR I, WR II *The World as Will and Representation*, vols. 1 and 2

Introduction

Why is philosophy obsessed with tragedy? Aristotle thought that tragedy exemplified the pity and terror of life in a world beyond human control. According to Friedrich Schelling, tragedy confronts the philosophical project by revealing nature's indifference to rational ideas. G. W. F. Hegel claimed that tragedy attends to incommensurability and strife in ways that exceed the conceptual framework of propositional language. Each of these philosophers examines tragedy in relation to a different set of problems, and yet each conceives it as a transformative bridge over the abyss that falls between the propositions of philosophy, and lived experience. Immanuel Kant implied that philosophy might always need this kind of transformation. He observed that human reason is burdened by a peculiar fate that, without proper guidance, incessantly drives it to stray beyond experiential limits. For Schelling and Hegel, tragedy thrusts this fate before our blinkered eyes, revealing nature as the supreme limit of human reason. And yet it also prompts us to conceptualize nature as reason's teacher. In this sense tragedy is not simply an artistic genre, though its artistic qualities are vital to its power. It is a way of opening an expansive and distinctly philosophical project that seeks to acknowledge the limits of human powers; it follows that this acknowledgment must transform our thinking. This project is not limited to philosophy as a specialized academic enterprise but also concerns the broader human task of living well in a world that refuses to bend itself to our desires.

Tragedy matters because our understanding of the world is out of joint. It seems that we have all the tools to solve the problems we face, and yet we fail to do so. How else can we think about this predicament than through tragedy? The ancient tragedians were unburdened by the modern notions of subjectivity that frame our epistemic and moral capacities as natural endowments that immediately correspond to the world. They looked

with wonder at the way that humans inhabit the world, celebrating their power to shape and order nature while noting their fundamental incapacity to attune themselves to their condition. In *Prometheus Bound*, for example, Aeschylus shows that the true character of human agency does not manifest itself in military triumph, the building of cities, or athletic prowess, but in collision with nature's irresistible power. Sophocles' *Antigone* alerts us to the fact that our immense capacity to domesticate and govern the material world does not necessarily translate into self-knowledge, or self-mastery. Euripides' representation of Homer's *Iliad* in *The Trojan Women* emphasizes the visceral passions that impel human action, forces occluded by rationalization. Taken together, the tragedies constitute a penetrating perspective on the width of lived experience, opening a more expansive mode of representation than propositional language affords.

While philosophers have long attempted to incorporate tragic representation in the practice of philosophy, philosophical interest in tragedy continues to grow. Indeed, it has grown exponentially in recent years. From the philosophy of literature,¹ to political theory,² ethics,³ epistemology,⁴ feminist philosophy,⁵ and the history of philosophy,⁶ this interest is not limited to a particular subdiscipline but spans philosophy's diverse and often fragmented discursive terrain. Broadly speaking, contemporary philosophers who turn to tragedy share a concern that recent trends in the discipline have neglected the aspects of human experience that lie beyond the empirical sciences. They turn to tragedy to broaden philosophy's exclusive focus on epistemology into a more expansive engagement with the problems of living well in a natural sphere that is seemingly indifferent to human concerns.

While this study extends an interest in and affinity for tragedy inherent in the discipline of philosophy, I contend that the two primary stances toward tragedy assumed by contemporary philosophers ultimately work to undermine that interest and the reorientation of the philosophical gaze that it could achieve. The first of these—what I will call the Nietzschean view—follows Nietzsche in framing philosophy and tragedy as competing forms of presentation. “Tragedy” is used to refer directly to the dramatic form that rose to prominence in Athens during the fifth century BCE. “Philosophy,” on the other hand, is used to refer to a programmatic attempt to calcify the ambiguities of collective experience, which begins in Plato's Socrates and culminates in Kant's attempt to ground thought on an exclusively rational picture of morality. Because tragedy is *pre*-philosophical, meaning pre-Socratic, it is credited with an authority antecedent to the conceptual

presumptions of philosophy. Tragedy, in this view, contains vital lessons that illuminate humanity's tendency to misconstrue its own actions and the essential fragility of existence.

The second approach—what I will call the Idealist view—considers tragedy a distinctly philosophical idea, distilled from the dramatic genre of antiquity. As an idea, tragedy finds its most crystalline definition in the work of the post-Kantian philosophers—in Schelling's work particularly—as a means to express the failure of philosophy's attempt to understand the "Idea" as timeless form. Again, Kant becomes one of tragedy's greatest enemies, in that his separation of the practical sphere of morality from the theoretical sphere of nature figures the last attempt to give practical reason unlimited jurisdiction over human life. In opposition to Kant, the "idea of tragedy" becomes a supreme oxymoron, or as one scholar put it, a "catachresis beyond oxymoron," pushing conceptual thought to its limit.⁷ The idea of tragedy spells the end of philosophy conceived as the pursuit of knowledge and the beginning of a conceptual structure modeled on the poetic method of the tragedians. Thus philosophy need not be abandoned. The task is to extend the post-Kantian break with traditional philosophy.

While both of these approaches aim to reanimate the themes of tragedy to expand the boundaries of contemporary philosophy, both operate under the assumption that tragedy is merely a thing of the past—that it is, for all intents and purposes, dead. Presuming the death of tragedy is not limited to philosophers who adopt Hegel's "end of art" thesis, the idea that art no longer satisfies us moderns. It is expressive of a broader methodological assumption that underpins Hegelian and anti-Hegelian thinkers alike. To begin with the assumed death of tragedy is to look upon tragedy as something alien to ourselves, a ghostly historical abstraction. This entails a gap between tragedy, historically understood, and whatever meaning it may have for us now.⁸

In this book I propose an alternative, one that does not consign "tragedy" to antiquity or reduce the analysis of tragedy to post-Kantian philosophy. Rather, I approach tragedy as an *ongoing philosophical problematic* diversely invoked to call into question ways of thinking that grant a technical account of reason exclusive jurisdiction in matters of knowledge and action. Thus, I do not see the philosophy of tragedy as the attempt to elevate a dramatic genre into the realm of ideas. Rather, I aspire to show that the tragedies themselves are, singularly, *philosophical* in their form of representation. It follows that tragedy is very much alive; indeed, it is much closer than we are inclined to admit.

To introduce this approach I reexamine the significance of Kant's thought to the philosophy of tragedy to show that the problem underpinning the two dominant schools discussed previously hinges upon their respective readings of Kant. While these readings find traction in parts of Kant's work, both have come under significant attack in recent scholarship, particularly in contemporary work on Kant's third installment in the critical project, *Critique of Judgment*. This scholarship conceives Kant as a thinker in motion. Kant opens the *Critique of Judgment* by addressing the failure of his earlier critical work to live up to its systematic ambitions. This acknowledgment, however, neither prompts him to bolster his earlier attempts at systematicity nor inclines him toward skepticism. Rather, it allows him to identify an enlarged procedure for thinking that expands the goal of philosophy from an exclusive focus on knowledge to matters of living well in the natural sphere that does not spontaneously meld with the interests of reason. Of course, there remain significant problems in Kant's work that require elaboration, and the extent to which his revised approach to nature altered his commitment to traditional ontology remains contested. Yet if we understand Kant as a dynamic thinker who attempted to turn the failings of his work into self-awareness, then we discover that this development within his thought expresses and anticipates the movement that contemporary scholars promote through reference to tragedy. Drawing these bodies of research together—contemporary work on tragedy and recent developments in Kant scholarship—I aim to show that each of these conversations can enhance the other, that recent work on Kant's expansive vision of philosophy outlined in the third *Critique* provides a compelling vision of the kind of thinking sought by contemporary scholars of tragedy.

In this book, therefore, I argue that tragedy is best understood as an ongoing philosophical problematic that seeks to expand the scope of philosophy in the paradigm of the “enlarged way of thinking” (*erweiterte Denkungsart*) that Kant develops in *Critique of Judgment*. Kant's notion of an enlarged way of thinking exemplifies a procedure of communal thinking based on his discoveries in the third *Critique*. It outlines a noncognitive procedure by which thinkers gain a reflective stance toward their immediate experience and open their view to their neighbor and their neighbor's best possibilities. Kant describes enlarged thinking in terms of a dramatized form of self-awareness, whereby the thinker “sets himself apart from the subjective private conditions of the judgment, within which so many others are as if bracketed, and reflects on his own judgment from a universal standpoint” (*CJ* 5:295). Developing such a position is no easy task. Kant's point is

that if we are to move beyond “narrow-minded” (*bornierte*) thinking, in which the thinker understands himself simply in relation to an object, to an enlarged approach through which the thinker conceptualizes himself as part of a community of judges, then the thinker must engage in a process of self-reflection—or rather, self-limitation—in order to imaginatively join the audience of his broader community, and, from that perspective, stand as judge of his own claim. The principle of enlarged thinking remains, like the principles of the first and second *Critiques*, transcendental. Yet the use of this principle requires cultivation in the context of a community of inquirers. To be clear, I am not claiming that Kant modeled his paradigm on the tragedies, or that he conceived his work in terms of tragedy. Rather, I am concerned with identifying a shared project of which the Athenian tragedians and Kant are a vital part, a project united by the attempt to hold human spontaneity in genuine union with nature. Concordantly, I aim to show that it is only as an ongoing problematic that tragedy retains its vitality.

The continuity I seek to establish can be seen in a curious parallel between Kant’s proposal for a dramatized form of thinking and Aristotle’s discussion of tragedy in *Poetics*. In *Poetics*, Aristotle famously described tragedy as the most philosophic of the arts.⁹ He identified the philosophical nature of tragedy in the distinction between its content (*hule*) and form (*eidos*). The content of tragedy is action, alerting us to the significance of tragedy to practical considerations in philosophy. In Aristotle’s words, a tragedy is “the imitation [*mimesis*] of an action [*praxeos*] that is serious [*spoudaia*] and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself [*teleias*].”¹⁰ More specifically, Aristotle states that the content of tragedy (the action) is drawn from the myths and stories that populate the inherited imaginative landscape of the Athenians, that is, the same content we find in epic. What sets tragedy apart from epic is its form. While epic gives a direct presentation of the content of myth by means of an authoritative choral voice, the dramatic form brings actors on stage to accompany the chorus. The art (*techne*) of the tragic poets is to imitate an action, and yet their creative use of form transfigures the orientation of the spectators to the action presented through a complex interplay of reversals and recognitions in the plot development. As the univocal form of epic is replaced with the polyvocal dramatic form, the spectators find themselves in the position of the judicial council, filled with pity and fear at the discovery that the hero’s downfall could easily have been theirs (for Aristotle, this is the universal, philosophical dimension of tragedy) yet nonetheless faced with the task of assessing the claims made by the ancient heroes. In this respect, the difference between tragedy and

other genres is not so much a matter of content (such as unhappy events) as of form (how those events are presented). As Aristotle saw it, tragedy is a form of presentation that transforms the relation of the spectators to the content that is represented, alerting them to the collective nature of judgment in regard to practical matters.

Both Aristotle and Kant alert us to a transformative experience that alters the form by which we relate to inherited ideas, recasting them in terms of unrealized projects. For Kant, enlarged thinking is not a matter of content but the form of thinking that results when the relation of the thinker to what is represented is ruptured. Kant makes it clear that the capacity to judge from a universal standpoint is not a result of “the healthy understanding,” that is, the faculty of concepts that conditions the possibility of knowledge (*CJ* 5:295). The understanding is interested; it aims to legislate nature according to concepts and does not seek confirmation from others. Alternatively, the capacity of enlarged thinking to judge from a universal standpoint is made possible by “taste,” for “the aesthetic power of judgment rather than the intellectual can bear the name of a common sense.” Aesthetic judgments are the exemplary practice of enlarged thought, for they are premised on the recognition of the subjective nature of their outcome and yet claim agreement from a community of judges. They are disinterested, for they replace subjective interest with a concern for the general. Kant shows at length that our capacity to judge without interest does not come easily. It requires a painful recognition of limits, for the understanding all too quickly governs and encloses our experience of nature. The remarkable discovery of *Critique of Judgment* is that in recognizing the failure of the understanding to govern nature, judgment discovers a new *a priori*. Aesthetic judgments are not rational to the extent that they subsume a particular under a predefined universal, leading to an end other than itself, to knowledge. They are rational to the extent that they aspire to ward universality. The *a priori* that underpins aesthetic judgment is not applied to nature or the will but to the faculty of judgment itself. The intuitive content of the judgment remains undetermined while the judgment—its claim to universality—is its own end.

This book’s central claim is that the transformative dimension of Kant’s thought is continuous with tragedy, and with the broader philosophical project that aims to extend the transformative mode of representation that is proper to it. I will pursue this claim through two routes. First I examine Kant’s argument in *Critique of Judgment* as an implicit response to the problem of tragedy (part 1). Then I explore how philosophers have employed

the notion of tragedy as a distinctly philosophical problem in order to alter the form that philosophy takes, from a form focused exclusively on knowledge to one that extends beyond truth-only cognition (part 2). In particular, I will explore some of the significant philosophical theories of tragedy—G. W. F. Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and Cornelius Castoriadis—to show that the appeal to tragedy does not signal the rejection of Kant but rather a creative attempt to expand the vision of philosophy in relation to Kant's proposal.

Tragedy in contemporary philosophy

Given the prevalence of tragedy in contemporary philosophy, why do we need *another* investigation of tragedy's nature and limits? As I have suggested, the contemporary interest in tragedy can be understood in terms of two predominant angles of inquiry, the "Nietzschean" and "Idealist" views. Naturally, this demarcation is a reductive one, for there is an extremely wide range of contemporary literature on tragedy. Yet it will serve my present purpose, which is to reject neither view but rather to show that they are part of a common project, one that could be enhanced if this commonality were accurately grasped. Each school can be anchored upon a respective seminal text: Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet's *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (1972), which inspires the Nietzschean view, and Peter Szondi's *An Essay on the Tragic* (1961), which provides the basic framework for the Idealist view. While each line of inquiry provides critical insight into the limitations of philosophical practice as it stands, I suggest that both fail to elucidate the proximity of tragedy to *every* philosophical endeavor. By attempting to contain tragedy within a sharply defined historical form, the contemporary turn to tragedy manifests a dehistoricized essentialism, thereby keeping tragedy at arm's length.

The Nietzschean view

Through a historical approach to fifth-century Athens, Vernant and Vidal-Naquet see philosophy and tragedy as competing forms of presentation and reject the philosophical tradition in favor of the mode of thinking expressed in the tragedies. Following Nietzsche, they examine the conditions surrounding tragedy's birth and death, arguing that tragedy "succeeded epic and lyric" before it "faded away as philosophy experienced its moment of triumph."¹¹

Again following Nietzsche, they frame philosophy's triumph negatively, suggesting that it attempts to hide from the fluidity of life behind the veil of reason. In order to rediscover the world obscured by Western rationality, Vernant and Vidal-Naquet argue that we must return to the tragedies, each of which "constitutes a message, enclosed within a text and inscribed within the structures of a discourse that must be analyzed at every level from the appropriate philological, stylistic, and literary points of view."¹²

While those who follow Vernant and Vidal-Naquet historicize tragedy by exploring its contextual meaning, they tend to dehistoricize philosophy, viewing philosophy as a way of thinking that labors to remove the ambiguity of life. According to this paradigm, philosophy must make way for a conceptual practice modeled upon the tragedies if we are to grasp the dimensions of experience beyond logical constraints. For Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, even philosophers who grapple with tragedy, such as Schelling and Hegel, retain this drive to contain life's ambiguity within an intellectual system antithetical to tragedy. Reason's drive to systematicity becomes a desperate attempt to occlude ambiguity, meaning that philosophy—the clearest expression of the will to knowledge—is fundamental to the problem.

Martha Nussbaum presents a Nietzschean view in *The Fragility of Goodness*. She begins by arguing that Plato, through Socrates, makes a "systematic assault" on tragic knowledge.¹³ Aristotle does little to correct this error, she informs us, for he develops "a complicated attempt to preserve some elements of the tragic picture while doing justice to Socrates' position." Nussbaum sets out to show that the tragedians reveal something obscured by the exhaustive religious comprehension of the world: the fact that the "ability to function as a citizen, the activities involved in various types of love and friendship, and even those activities associated with the major ethical virtues (courage, justice and so on) require external conditions that the agent's goodness cannot itself secure."¹⁴ She argues that the tragic poets offer an alternative that precedes Kant's attempt to rationalize morality,¹⁵ revealing that "powerful emotions, prominently including pity and fear, were sources of insight about human life."¹⁶

While Nussbaum's counter position of tragedy and philosophy may shed light on the limits of certain kinds of philosophy, her notion of "philosophy," and "Kantian" philosophy in particular, risks caricaturizing the Western tradition as a systematic attempt to overcome tragedy.¹⁷ This model reifies philosophy into an analytic mode of thinking alien to feeling and resistant to the fragility and disorder of tragedy. This deprives Nussbaum's account of the rich resources that philosophers can provide for identify-

ing the role of reasoned thought in a world that resists logical standards. In the following section I argue that the Nietzschean school could greatly benefit from an alternative methodological approach to historical genres that situates tragedy in the present rather than remembering it from history's farther shore. In other words, their work could be enhanced by tragedy conceived as a distinctly *philosophical* problematic capable of transforming the philosophical tradition.

The Idealist view

The second contemporary conception of tragedy does not, like the Nietzschean school, abandon the philosophical tradition but rather aligns itself with the post-Kantian transformation. I call this understanding the "Idealist" view because it takes the German idealist treatment of "the tragic"—the attempt to overcome the theoretical-practical dualism left by Kant's philosophy—as the deepest philosophical articulation of tragedy. Building from Szondi's *An Essay on the Tragic* (whether in agreement or not), it views philosophy's encounter with tragedy as a transition from a speculative understanding of metaphysics that insulates the subject from the finite conditions of experience to a mode of philosophy sensitive to the fluidity of life. Separating philosophy's uptake of tragedy from the poetic use of tragedy as a literary genre, Szondi argues the philosophy of the tragic was "begun by Schelling" and "runs through the Idealist and post-Idealist periods."¹⁸ He claims that Schelling's *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795–1796) inaugurates a philosophy of the tragic, which views tragedy (in the shape of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*) as the reconciliation between nature and freedom, for it presents the equilibrium between the "superior strength" of the objective world and the self-affirmation of the "I" in its absolute freedom.¹⁹

Terry Eagleton draws from Szondi, questioning the narrow vision of contemporary philosophy through appealing to Schelling's idea of the tragic. For Eagleton, the philosophy of tragedy reminds us that we are "amphibious animals" who inhabit the natural and intelligible realms, never quite at home in either.²⁰ He argues that "it is tragedy, rather than Kant, which supplies the solution" to the split condition of modern subjectivity, for it hurls a bridge over the disparate parts of our experience. In Eagleton's framework, the idea of the tragic acts as a kind of historical protagonist, bridging "the gap between pure and practical reason which the critical philosophy itself could never span."²¹

Dennis Schmidt also presents an Idealist view, arguing that the philosophy of tragedy confronts the narrow scope of modes of philosophy that are concerned exclusively with matters of knowledge. Following Szondi's historical framework, he suggests that "Schelling opens the door for what will prove to be an escalation of the importance of the question posed by tragedy," for it is Schelling who identifies the experience whereby the spectator feels the unity of nature and freedom in an extra-philosophical medium.²² The "turn to the work of art by philosophers since Kant" and the "move to reaffirm the integrity of the work of art for the project of self-understanding is clearly evident in contemporary works."²³ For Schmidt, tragedy has *already* transformed philosophy; our task is to continue this transformation by drawing upon, and extending, this tradition.

The Idealist view contains three significant problems, each of which becomes evident through historicization. The first is that Schelling was not the first philosopher in the so-called "preoccupation with Greek tragedy."²⁴ The fascination with restaging the tragedies exploded in France during the seventeenth century, causing philosophers such as Jean-Baptiste Dubos and Jean-Jacques Rousseau to explore the merits and dangers of tragic theater for national modesty.²⁵ As this development spread to Britain, philosophers such as David Hume and James Moor grappled with the paradox that the "tragic effect" posed to the understanding of moral sentiment (see chapter 1).²⁶ The influence of these thinkers in Germany and the extensive popularity of German translations of Shakespeare's tragedies led to a host of philosophical work on tragedy in German philosophy in the mid- to late-eighteenth century, most significantly in the work of Johann Gottfried Herder. In the 1770s Herder reflected on tragedy in order to develop a historical theory of taste, building a system that aimed to unite reason and feeling in sensuous cognition in a manner that influences Schelling's treatment of Kant.²⁷ While it is true, as Joshua Billings notes, that Schelling's treatment of tragedy extends beyond Dubos and Moor's affective understanding on one hand and Herder's historical reading of tragedy on the other, Schelling's philosophy does not break from this tradition.²⁸ For the original readers of Schelling's interpretation of tragedy in *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, the appeal to Herder and the desire to read Kant through the lens of the *Sturm und Drang* movement would have been clear. The conclusion that tragic philosophy was "begun by Schelling" is only possible if Schelling's treatment of tragic art is decisive in such a way that renders previous treatments mere poetics and the contemporary philosophy of tragedy merely descriptive.

The second problem with the Idealist view is that it relies on a conception of Kant's critical philosophy that was not accepted by Kant's immediate successors (see chapter 4) and is no longer accepted in Kant scholarship today (see chapters 2 and 3). Proponents of this narrative undermine Kant's own attempt to bridge theoretical and practical reason through his critique of taste and the expansion of his concept of nature, and thus they elide Kant's successors' use of tragedy to understand Kant's notion of teleology and nature's self-organization. This reading reflects an ongoing bias in Kantian scholarship toward a reading of *Critique of Judgment* that favors part 1 (Critique of Aesthetic Judgment) and undermines the importance of part 2 (Critique of Teleological Judgment), a bias that has been heavily criticized in recent decades.²⁹

The third problem with this narrative is that it reifies philosophical concepts by isolating a single "tragic idea" (Szondi) or "tragic absolute" (Lacoue-Labarthe, Krell) from the constraints of history and culture. For Szondi, the tragic idea is a "dialectical phenomenon" that is concerned not with historically specific subject matter but with "freedom itself, which, now at odds with itself, becomes its own adversary."³⁰ For Lacoue-Labarthe and Krell, tragedy is "the absolute *organon* . . . because tragedy is itself presentation of the tragedy of the absolute."³¹ In this conception, tragedy presents the failure of the Kantian dualism, fusing freedom and necessity into a single experience and thereby conflating theoretical and practical reason into a single, aesthetic task. Szondi sets the framework for this view by defining the task as rendering "the various definitions of the tragic comprehensible by revealing a more or less concealed structural element that is common to all."³² He states that the task is not to consider their theories of tragedy "in view of their specific philosophies" but "in the hope of securing a general concept of the tragic."

The problem with Szondi's method, as Julian Young notes in *The Philosophy of Tragedy*, is that the conditions that "made tragedy an important phenomenon in the nineteenth century cannot be elevated into an account of what makes tragedy an important phenomenon *tout court*," since in other times the genre of tragedy is called upon to confront different content.³³ Young is sensitive to the dialogical character of tragedy, suggesting that if we take the meaning that nineteenth-century philosophers found in tragedy as the key to understanding the philosophical importance of tragedy as a whole, we limit the power of tragic art to a particular moment in philosophical history that is, for all intents and purposes, finished.

Method in the history of philosophy

If we accept Young's critique of philosophers who dehistoricize the tragedy, we require a method sensitive to the historical condition of genre. The same concern animates both the Nietzschean and Idealist views: to identify tragedy's proper content. The Nietzschean view is concerned with reconstructing the environment of ancient Athens to show how tragedy presents the collision of Greek *anthropos* and the symbolic order of the gods. The Idealist view, on the other hand, is concerned with defining the modern experience of tragedy as that between the theoretical and practical orders of Kantian philosophy. While it may be true that tragedy is difficult for us to see in our technologized society, where problems are framed as mere puzzles requiring the correct application of expertise, the Idealist and Nietzschean do not consider the possibility of seeing tragedy anew. This is because they do not give attention to the *form* of tragedy and thus distance this form from the apparent present. In conceptualizing tragedy as a thing of the past, the Idealist and Nietzschean views undermine their ultimate goal: to open a narrow definition of philosophical practice to new horizons of experience.

These schools foreground a problem of method in the history of ideas. Proponents of the Nietzschean view, on one hand, use the language of "Greek tragedy"³⁴ or "tragic man,"³⁵ presuming that an authentic understanding of the ancient Greek tragedy can be reached. This approach ignores the dynamic origins of tragedy, undermining the fact that tragedy developed in the hands of creative agents for over a century. It also ignores the fact that only thirty-two of more than a thousand tragedies written for the City Dionysia remain today.³⁶ To make any definitive claim about the nature of the tragic genre from this sample seems tenuous at best. Even if we were to presume that the thirty-two remaining tragedies written by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were all that were written, they are so diverse that the attempt to provide a definitive account of Greek tragedy must appeal to a single play or a set of similar plays, arbitrarily claiming that it expresses the "true greatness" of the tragic spirit, whatever that may be.

Proponents of the Idealist view, on the other hand, employ a historical method that undermines the agency of philosophers. Here philosophical engagement with tragedy is forcibly abstracted by a reductive and mechanistic language—that tragedy is "programmed by the horizon opened by the critical philosophy."³⁷ Others employ desubjectified language appropriate to an organic process beyond human agency—that tragedy "emerged in Greece at the end of the sixth century"³⁸ and that it "appears" again in the "wake

of Kant.”³⁹ The language of “program” suggests that the idea of tragedy was set in motion by a force external to the philosophers who bear the idea, while the language of “appearance” connotes an organic process whereby a particular arises as an expression of a greater whole. In both analogies, the whole is the necessary and sufficient condition of the particular, implying that the particular (in this case, the philosophy of tragedy) is fated by a historical force outside of the agents (philosophers such as Schelling) who bring it into being.

The alternative method I use in this book draws from Quentin Skinner’s “new history,” which begins by historicizing philosophical problems.⁴⁰ The mechanical and organic analogies used by the Idealist view frame history as a tragic drama in which, to use Skinner’s words, “ideas get up and do battle on their own behalf.”⁴¹ Skinner argues that the tendency of historians of philosophy to search for an “ideal type” leads to a kind of “non-history” in which philosophers figure merely as occasions for their ideas. This methodology cultivates “anticipations” of later doctrines, assessing each writer in terms of his or her ability to predict the subject matter to which the historian attends. According to Skinner, “philosophers have perhaps been rather slow” to question the model of history implicit to this method, failing to note the serious implications it has “for the analysis of meaning and understanding, as well as for the discussion of the relations between belief and action, and in general over the whole question of the sociology of knowledge.”⁴² Thus understood, to ignore the particularity and creativity of past philosophers is to practice a dehistoricized conception of philosophy.

John Dewey describes this dehistoricized approach as the method of the “*contemporary* philosopher” of history. Such a philosopher comes to his work “protected and perhaps muffled by an immense intervening apparatus.” He has, in his head, “a vast body of distinctions previously made, of problems already formulated, of solutions formulated ready to hand.” In Dewey’s terms, the contemporary philosopher “technalizes” in advance the two variables involved in the historical task: “himself as a thinker and the cultural material thought about.”⁴³ Dewey’s notion of technalized thinking concerns the kind of method used in the history of ideas. A technalized method examines the production of ideas exclusively through Aristotle’s paradigm of *technē*, which concerns the practical knowledge of the craftsman who understands the principles that govern the production of a defined craft. For instance, in the craft of medicine the doctor has a clear aim, or *telos*, enabling control over her field, providing accurate knowledge that is teachable, reliable, and certifiable. She acts upon her patient by following

preestablished principles in the abstracted context of the hospital. Of course, there is much room for contingency in the medical craft, and the doctor may have to think on her feet. Aristotle's key point, however, is that *techné* is action directed toward a predefined goal.⁴⁴ The principles used by the doctor are consistent to the extent that bodies are. Thus the product of *techné* is evaluated without reference to the motivation or intention of the producer; her work is purely technical, in the sense that anyone with knowledge of the principles of the art could have produced it. Dewey argues that philosophers who take an exclusively technical approach to the history of ideas conflate the specificity of the philosophers who wield these ideas, occluding the living and organic relationship they have with their singular environment. Yet philosophers who use a technical approach also abstract their own specificity, presuming that the ideas they are examining are separable from themselves. Once the philosopher of history has technalized the two variables—the philosopher under inquiry and herself as inquirer—"the material thought about is not the existent scene but ideas and doctrines previously distilled from a great variety of other such scenes."⁴⁵

Dewey's theory of the technalized procedure of contemporary philosophy sheds light on the way that recent philosophers have understood the importance of tragedy. To technalize oneself and the object of study positions one as a disinterested spectator separate from what is being studied. It abstracts ideas from the locale of the philosopher, structurally implying a dualism between life and the idea. This dualism is evident in Szondi's method, which overlooks the specific philosophies of each thinker to construct "a general concept of the tragic." Therein he obscures the dynamic way that philosophers employed the form of tragedy to contest and transform problems specific to their context. Dewey suggests that we can avoid the problems of technalized thinking if we take care to identify the ideas that were "alive and active in forming the mind of the philosopher." To do this, we must "reconstruct the environment sufficiently to know what problems its needs imposed upon the thinker, and what direction it gave to the imaginings it invoked."⁴⁶

This reconstruction cannot be aimed to stabilize historical meaning. As Mikhail Bakhtin notes, the attempt to appropriate a living form such as a word, genre, or idea is not a simple matter of looking for a defining moment of origin or a single, conclusive articulation. Rather, it is a "complicated process," with "neither a first nor a last word" nor "limits to the dialogic context."⁴⁷ Even past meanings "can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all)," for "they will always change (be renewed) in the process

of subsequent, future development of the dialogue.” Bakhtin notes that as any dialogue progresses, there are “immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings,” which means that it is impossible to arrive at the finite understanding of a living form. This is particularly germane to the idea of tragedy, which has served myriad purposes throughout its turbulent history. In order to be sensitive to the many voices who contribute to a historical form, Bakhtin suggests an alternative method that recognizes the creativity of each voice that contributes to a dialogue, recognizing that “at certain moments of the dialogue’s subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context).”⁴⁸ Because ideas take shape from the creative agents attempting to navigate specific situations, we require then a method attuned to the specific, that is, the living, nature of ideas. Our task is not to stabilize past meanings but to allow living forms to arise in present contexts.

Following the methodological reflections made by Skinner, Dewey, and Bakhtin, the method I use in this book will approach tragedy as a *living problematic*, a form of thinking creatively employed across a breadth of contexts to disrupt, problematize, and transform present modes of thinking, to cleave an open space for new possibilities.⁴⁹ Approaching tragedy as a living problematic involves the recognition that, as Bakhtin said of language, tragedy is “populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others.”⁵⁰ Thus we begin with the contexts in which tragedy has been used to frame and challenge the task of thinking, while recognizing that our attempt to interpret these contexts is itself a creative activity, drawing tragedy into a new and living present. This entails that our task cannot provide a definitive account of Attic tragedy or identify a single tragic Idea ghosting history. Rather, our method must be cognizant of historical interpretation as a self-reflective science. If philosophy is to take account of tragedy, it must come with a properly historical approach to its own status as a contextually constituted discipline. Put otherwise, a proper historical method and recognizing the full import of tragedy are intimately linked and teach familial lessons.

Elucidating the problematic of tragedy thus, I aim to show that the contemporary turn to tragedy is more than a further step in the cavalcade of historical ideas; it expresses, rather, a deeper crisis in the landscape of philosophical inquiry. In other words, it constitutes a new, creative attempt to suspend the law of the given no less vital than other historical attempts to grasp the problem of human tragedy. Raymond Williams makes a similar point by identifying the philosophical importance of tragedy in its

transformative character. Through presenting our own experience in tragic form, “new connections are made, and the familiar world shifts, as the new relations are seen.”⁵¹ If we think that the philosophy of tragedy is “a single and permanent kind of fact,” Williams argues, “we can end only with the metaphysical conclusions that are built into any such assumption.” If we reject this assumption, however, the problem is necessarily transformed: “Tragedy is then not a permanent kind of fact, but a series of experiences and conventions and institutions.”⁵² Thus we “are not looking for a new universal meaning of tragedy” but for the “structure of tragedy” in our own times.⁵³ Williams argues that to discern the structure of tragedy in a given epoch is not fatalistic. Rather, recognizing what has “fatefully” come into being through a community’s own action enlarges one’s view of what one is doing. This achieved, Williams observes, “other directions seem open.” With this in mind, my task is to identify new possible directions within the contemporary turn to tragedy.

Overview

This book is divided into two parts. Part 1, “Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*,” provides an alternative to the Idealist and Nietzschean views by reassessing the role of Kant’s critical project in the philosophy of tragedy. In chapter 1 I examine the conversation occurring during the eighteenth century regarding the authority of the natural sciences and the role of aesthetics in mediating science and philosophy. This conversation expresses a broader collision of epochs wherein an inherited order of value confronts the new demands of empirical science. Within this collision we find that philosophers such as Hume, Moor, and Herder raise the problematic of tragedy well before Kant in order to problematize the rationalist separation of sense from reason and to outline a way of conceiving human spontaneity as something that is in genuine union with nature.

Chapters 2 and 3 consider Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* in light of this conversation. I argue that Kant’s third *Critique* can be understood to raise the problematic of tragedy—at least implicitly—as a means to question and ultimately transform two failures he discovered within his own critical project. The first is the failure of his exclusively technical account of judgment to provide a reasoned way of thinking in contexts that lack the necessity demanded by the understanding. I suggest that by acknowledging this failure and allowing it to transform his project, Kant discovered a

noncognitive procedure capable of finding unity in aesthetic diversity. The ground of this procedure is not the understanding but the idea of mutual communicability, opening the critical project from an exclusive focus on knowledge toward matters of living well.

Having identified Kant's discovery of judgment's reflective procedure from within the failure of his earlier critical work, in chapter 3 I explore Kant's response to a second failure: the failure of his exclusively technical approach to morality to inspire humanity's moral vocation. I suggest that by introducing three new aspects to reflective judgment in the final drafts of the third *Critique*—genius, the sublime, and *sensus communis*—Kant aims to ground the procedure of reflective judgment in the ethical practice of a community. While practical reason remains separate from lived experience, Kant suggests that the poet is capable of giving a sensuous expression to the unlimited domain of freedom *within* the realm of nature, thus allowing us to feel the unity of the biological and rational spheres in aesthetic experience. The work of beautiful art becomes the exemplary product of the imagination, orienting a community toward the realization of their moral calling through the collective use of reflective judgment. This move does not leave the critical project unaltered. By reconfiguring the critical enterprise as a historical project, Kant places the transcendental legislation of the will in a subordinate position to nature. While Kant refuses to collapse freedom into nature, he acknowledges that human dependency is prior to human freedom and provides the ground for it.⁵⁴ I conclude that Kant's project is in continuity with tragedy, for it envisages spontaneity as both independent from and in genuine union with nature.

Part 2, "Tragedy after Kant," builds from the argument of part 1 by exploring tragedy as an ongoing philosophical problematic that aims to expand the scope of philosophy in the paradigm of Kant's proposal of an enlarged way of thinking. I turn to four philosophers who "populate," to use Bakhtin's term, the notion of tragedy: Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Castoriadis. This study is hardly comprehensive; many key voices that populate the problematic of tragedy are largely overlooked, such as Friedrich Schelling, Friedrich Hölderlin, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Søren Kierkegaard, Jacques Lacan, and Michel Foucault, to name just a few. Rather, it intends to examine philosophy's relation to Greek tragedy as a continuous dialogue throughout philosophical history. Thus I include one philosopher canonical to the Idealist view (Hegel), two philosophers significant to the Nietzschean view (Nietzsche and Heidegger), and one philosopher who corresponds to neither view and assists us to call them

both into question (Castoriadis). My approach will attempt to broaden this analysis, where possible, by including other significant voices to show how the notions of tragedy put forward by Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger were received outside their times.

I begin part 2 with Hegel, whose philosophical treatment of tragedy has gained significant attention in contemporary scholarship. While Nietzsche, Heidegger, Benjamin, and Adorno turn to tragedy as a means to usurp Hegel's attempt to sublate tragedy into a philosophy of history, recent scholarship claims that it is precisely by revising Hegel's view of tragedy that his thought can be reclaimed as a nonmetaphysical project of self-understanding. Building on this scholarship, I argue that Hegel's philosophy of art is in nearer continuity with Kant's third *Critique* than is often observed. Hegel notes that by cleaving open a symbolic sphere separate from the impassable theoretical sphere of limit and fixity, Kant enlarged philosophy's perception to the domain of alteration and becoming. However, Kant made this significant discovery only to limit the theoretical sphere of ends and morality to a static ontology governed by an eternal infinite. Hegel employs the problematic of tragedy in order to dethrone the fixity of the concepts of the understanding, reconciling us with a process of becoming within one sphere of being. To do so, he claims that the meaning of tragedy lies exclusively in reconciliation. In my discussion of Hegel's theory of tragedy I suggest that for this claim to convince us, we must accept that his theory of tragedy is capable of resisting *all* competing theories of tragedy. I argue that failing on this count, Hegel's claim does not convince. To make this case I explore the work of Walter Benjamin, which suggests that Hegel notes the vitality of Kant's enlarged thought only to reduce it to philosophically defined shape. I conclude that while Hegel gives a convincing portrayal of the power of tragedy to alert us to what is beyond philosophy, tragedy cannot reconcile us to it. Rather, tragedy calls for self-limitation, turning our attention to the sphere of collective sense making that is always more than what can be constituted as knowledge.

Having explored Hegel's work as a *philosophy* of tragedy—a system that claims the supremacy of philosophy over the singularity of art—I then turn to Nietzsche's work in terms of a *tragic philosophy*—a philosophy that privileges the singularity of art. In this chapter I give particular attention to Nietzsche's most extensive engagement with the subject in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In this bold and exciting text Nietzsche argues that philosophy does not heal the experience of tragedy. Rather, it occludes it. Philosophy, for Nietzsche, constructs a veneer of self-deception, while art draws us into

the deeper truth in which violence, strife, and conflict are inextricable from Being. The question I pose to the Nietzsche of *The Birth of Tragedy* is whether his purely aesthetic understanding of reality serves his ultimate task: to reconcile us to the world and thereby open us to an aesthetic redemption. By focusing on Nietzsche's understanding of Kant's role in the so-called "rebirth" of tragedy, I suggest that he misconstrues the transformative character of Kant's project. Instead of challenging the Kantian dualism of the first *Critique*, Nietzsche inverts it, thus ignoring the aesthetic approach to ethical and social matters opened by Kant. To outline the consequences of Nietzsche's argument, I turn to Franz Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption*. From a historical moment vastly different to Nietzsche's, Rosenzweig assists us to see that Nietzsche's attempt to equate reality and aesthetics problematically obfuscates the ethical dimension of experience. For Rosenzweig, this entails that Nietzsche can only achieve aesthetic redemption at an unacceptable cost.

In chapter 6 I turn to Heidegger's reading of tragedy. Heidegger begins by criticizing Nietzsche's theory in terms comparable to those of Benjamin and Rosenzweig, declaring that Nietzsche stands as the last metaphysician who fails to overcome the problematic dualism he inherits from Kant. I examine two of the lecture series in which Heidegger critiques the technical thinking of the modern era through reference to tragedy: *Introduction to Metaphysics* and *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister."* I argue that Heidegger's reading of the tragedies attempts to locate the origin of the political sphere in philosophy. By collapsing the distinction between the political and the philosophic, Heidegger removes the importance of human praxis and conceives of history as the recognition of a preexisting meaning. I conclude that this understanding of tragedy deprives his critique of technical thinking of a meaningful confrontation with the problems of modernity. Heidegger's reading of tragedy unveils the political sphere as a site of interpersonal experience only to remove it from the domain of human agency, drastically undermining the significance of his achievement.

In chapter 7 I turn to Castoriadis' interpretation of tragedy as an alternative to the Idealist and Nietzschean views. Castoriadis' interpretation of tragedy draws from *Critique of Judgment* in order to show that Kant not only provides a lasting representation of the problematic of tragedy, but that he also discovers a profound solution. Building on Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, Castoriadis shows that Kant's third *Critique* opens a path to overcome determinacy in various guises by emphasizing the organic freedom of human cognition. Yet departing from their approaches to tragedy,

Castoriadis connects Kant's enlarged vision of social and political life and the tragedies, showing that both advance a project that is genuinely open and must always remain open. Castoriadis concludes that both tragedy and Kant's expansive vision of philosophy reframe human dependency as the condition of the possibility of freedom, thereby defining freedom in terms of praxis—a collective, open project.

The final chapter draws the argument of this book together by identifying three dimensions of tragedy understood as an ongoing philosophical problematic that are developed in contemporary philosophy: the expansion of the imagination, the recognition of ethical complexity, and the search for a new understanding of universality. These themes express the ongoing significance of Kant's enlarged way of thinking for navigating the failure of philosophy to respond to human problems that lie beyond our capacity to understand them and point toward the contemporary significance of tragedy.

Part I

Kant's *Critique of Judgment*

From Disembodied Soul to Embodied Mind

Human reason has the peculiar fate in one species of its cognitions that it is burdened with questions that it cannot dismiss . . . but which it also cannot answer. . . . Reason falls into this embarrassment through no fault of its own.

—Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*¹

In 1687, Isaac Newton published *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* with the financial assistance of his admiring colleague, Edmund Halley. The original publication includes an ode to Newton written by Halley himself, announcing the cultural and historical significance of Newton's discoveries:

Matters that vexed the minds of ancient seers,
And for our learned doctors often led
To loud and vain contention, now are seen
In reason's light, the cloud of ignorance
Dispelled at last by science. Those on whom
Delusion cast its gloomy pall of doubt,
Upborne now on the wings that genius lends,
May penetrate the mansions of the gods,
And scale the heights of heaven, O mortal men
Arise!²

Halley depicts Newton as a Promethean figure, soaring on the wings of genius above the miasmas of superstition that hitherto cloaked the mind of

God. He envisions a generation inspired by the light of reason brought to bear on the world by discoveries that will empower the formerly ignorant to “*Discern the changeless order of the world, and all the eons of its history.*”³

According to Halley, Newton’s genius lies in two distinct features: his discovery of this “changeless order” and his ability to communicate this discovery to the general public. These grandiose claims notwithstanding, less than fifty years after the publication of *Mathematical Principles* scientists conducting research in the life sciences began to see a critical flaw in Newton’s work. The basic assumption guiding Newton’s project was that the demonstrative, mathematical paradigm of knowledge provides the standard for the sciences. In order to adhere to this standard, Newton outlines a mechanical concept of nature in which active forces press upon inert matter. His third law of motion—“to every action there is always opposed an equal reaction”⁴—presumes a concept of nature that can be wholly explained in the paradigm of efficient causation, for every natural event is deemed to have a necessary and sufficient cause. Yet as the development of optical technologies made it possible to observe organic life on a cellular level, biologists were able to study the fertilization and early growth of seeds and eggs. They were faced with the task of explaining how individual parts within a single cell could form independently of each other and yet somehow cohere as an organic unity. While some responded by strengthening Newton’s mechanical view of nature by developing the idea of “molds” that press preestablished form upon inert matter, others began to search for an idea of matter capable of giving form to itself. This organic concept of matter stands radically opposed to Newton’s mechanical view; it rejects a dualism between matter and force by attributing motion to matter itself. It entails that the “form” or “law” of an organism does not preexist its development or press upon it as an exterior power. Rather, it is expressed through the organism’s constituent parts.

This self-forming concept of nature stands in tension with Newtonian physics, for it entails that organic events are contingent; they have necessary but not sufficient conditions of existence. If we begin from the contingency of organic events, then we require an alternative mode of explanation to Newton’s. Organic events cannot be fully explained through efficient causality, which explains change or movement according to the external conditions that act upon an object. Rather, they express an end toward which they are directed, requiring the explanatory paradigm of final causation, which opens scientific inquiry to matters of will and purpose. If providing an explanation for organic genesis requires a self-forming concept of nature, then the task

of the life scientist would not be to provide a “changeless” system of natural phenomena that can explain “all the eons of [natural] history,” as Haldane put it. Rather, the life scientist’s task would be to give account of singular organisms through a process of codetermination wherein both observer and observed are dynamically involved, the observed expressing form for which the observer seeks to give account. This approach rejects the notion of science as the construction of a complete system that we find in Newton’s natural philosophy and recasts the scientific endeavor as an open project. Such a project requires a sensuous kind of thinking whereby the observer searches for a principle adequate to the phenomenon under observation. This mode of thinking would be both sensuous *and* rational, for it would search for form within nature as experienced through the senses.

The aim of this chapter is to show that in the midst of the collision between the rationalist concept of nature inherited by philosophy and the organic concept of nature emerging in the life sciences, poets and philosophers employed the language and form of tragedy in order to express the inner tensions of this experience. Genius ceases to be modeled on natural scientists such as Newton, who boldly discover the changeless order of nature. Instead, it is modeled on poets such as the ancient tragedians, who use the seemingly changeless order of nature to express natural spontaneity. Through identifying the importance of tragedy for navigating this transition, I aim to show that tragedy did not first appear as a significant matter of philosophical discourse in post-Kantian philosophy, as the Idealist view suggests. Rather, it returns during the mid-eighteenth century in the work of philosophers and poets as a way of framing the tension between traditional philosophy and the experience of nature as a domain of radical singularity.

Before I begin, it is necessary to situate the renewed interest in tragedy in the mid-eighteenth century in the context of a broader reconsideration of Aristotle’s practical and rhetorical texts, such as *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Rhetoric*, and *Poetics*. In these texts, one of Aristotle’s primary concerns is to distinguish between two spheres of human thinking and to map out the appropriate use of reason in each sphere. In book 6 of *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example, Aristotle states that theoretical thinking (*theoretike dianoia*) deals with “things that cannot be other than they are,” such as mathematics and geometry. Practical thinking (*praktike dianoia*), on the other hand, is the principled way of dealing with “things that admit of being other than they are,” such as nature, politics, and art.⁵ Both forms of thinking are

concerned with distinguishing truth from falsity, though the authority of practical thinking is limited to action.

Having mapped out the appropriate domain of practical thinking in terms of contingency, Aristotle then makes a finer distinction between two ways that action is guided by reason, *techne* and *phronesis*. First, he defines *techne* as the “reasoned state of capacity to make.”⁶ The mode of activity distinct to *techne* is *poiesis*. Thus, *techne* is productive, expressing the kind of knowledge possessed by the craftsman who understands the principles (*logoi, aitiai*) underlying the production of an object, such as a house, a table, or the state of being healthy. The technician acts upon his object in the paradigm of efficient causation: the material (*hule*) gives the maker something to work on, the form (*eidos*) is realized in the material, and the end (*telos*) is the realized form. The principles that govern the production of an object are teachable, reliable, and certifiable. Thus *techne* is interested, for it is subservient to a set of principles appropriate to achieving a preestablished end. Aristotle defines *phronesis*, on the other hand, as the “reasoned state of capacity to act.” It is characteristic of a person who knows how to live well (*euzen*) in contexts that do not adhere to principles that can be known in advance. The form of activity distinct to *phronesis* is *praxis*, which does not make something with a given end in view, as does *poiesis*. Rather, it “is itself an end”; “good action” is the end of *phronesis*.⁷ The teleological dimension of *phronesis* entails that it does not produce something in the paradigm of efficient causation, where events have necessary and sufficient causes. Rather, it produces according to final causation, which involves the deliberation of a purposive subject. In this sense *phronesis* is not governed by principles that are teachable or reliable in general cases. Rather, it is concerned “with the ultimate particular fact, since the thing to be done is of this nature.” The attention *phronesis* gives to singularity entails that it is the kind of knowledge appropriate for living things, such as the *polis*. “Technical” considerations are thus contrasted with “political” considerations, just as making a table is contrasted with political action. A table is judged as an artifact, that is, without references to the motivations of the craftsman. A political act, on the other hand, is judged as an action, meaning that it cannot be evaluated apart from the aims of the citizen.

During the eighteenth century, philosophers and scientists became increasingly dissatisfied with the rationalist model of practical thinking, which grants *techne* an unrestricted authority over contingent matters. They turned to Aristotle’s separation of *phronesis* from *techne* for an alternative way to schematize the use of reason in practical matters. By separating cases

in which the subject matter adheres to principles that are teachable, reliable, and certifiable from cases in which the subject matter is, by nature, underdetermined, Aristotle was seen to outline a reasoned way of thinking in regard to self-forming organisms. In the search for a new mode of practical thinking attuned to the singularity of organic life, such philosophers not only challenged the rationalist separation of reason from sensation, they also renewed philosophy's concern with tragedy.

The problem of life

The tension in modern thought between the rationalist understanding of nature and the empirical sciences can be seen as the collision of a traditional system with novel demands, or, in the language of tragedy, a clash between old gods and new. To understand the origins of this tension, we begin with medieval philosophy. Broadly speaking, medieval philosophers concerned with the empirical dimensions of experience, such as science and art, drew from Neoplatonic resources, particularly from the transcendental principle of beauty. One of the central texts of Neoplatonism, Plato's *Timaeus*, articulates a rational, mathematical cosmology. By upholding mathematics as the foundational principle of order, Neoplatonism imagines the world as, in Umberto Eco's words, something "endowed with artistic order and resplendent with beauty."⁸ The creative act of the demiurge does not proceed in the form of creation *ex nihilo* but as a mode of production through which he imitates the higher, eternal world of form in order to shape the lower, material world. Thus understood, our sensory knowledge of the lower world and our experience of beauty are only complete when we recognize the higher form in which empirical objects participate.

Thomas Aquinas presents a Neoplatonic view of creation in *Commentary on Divine Names*. He states that beauty is "a participation in the first cause, which makes all things beautiful. So that the beauty of creatures is simply a likeness of the divine beauty in which things participate."⁹ In Aquinas' view, beautiful objects are produced according to predefined laws that allow them to participate in a beauty identified with Being itself. They are produced by nature according to necessary and sufficient principles, meaning that the beauty we experience in works produced by human skill involves the representation of preestablished form. The beautiful is a First Principle, an original harmony from which all things derive. Thus Aquinas can state that everything "that exists comes from beauty and goodness (from

God) as an effective principle. And things have their being in beauty and goodness as if in a principle that preserves and maintains.”¹⁰

Aquinas’ understanding of beauty as an effective principle builds not only from Neoplatonic sources but also from the speculative systems of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and *Physics*. Carol Porter describes Aquinas’ reading of Aristotle as a “scientific-technical” approach, for it prioritizes his speculative metaphysics over his account of practical and ethical subjects.¹¹ The dominance of the scientific-technical reading of Aristotle in medieval thought is reflected in the fact that his rhetorical and practical texts did not feature in medieval handbooks of the arts curriculum, and that neither *Rhetoric* nor *Poetics* were printed in the original five-volume Aldine Aristotle (1495–1498).¹² The absence of Greek tragedy in the Latin west meant that Aristotle’s *Poetics* found little purchase on the medieval imagination, while the poetics of Islamic philosopher Averroës, which outlined a writing pedagogy that addressed poetry and prose together, were more easily assimilated into medieval cultural life.¹³

Aquinas’ scientific-technical reading of Aristotle plays a central role in establishing the priority of Aristotle’s technical account of practical knowledge in modern philosophy, for it collapses the distinction between making (*poiesis*) and acting (*praxis*). The mode of practical knowledge that produces a world according to an efficient principle (a preestablished rule) is *techné*. Moreover, the mode of practical knowledge appropriate to human agents is also one of *techné*, for it requires the application of principles that participate in the original principle. Thus understood, the creative dimension that Aristotle ascribed to *praxis* is collapsed into *poiesis*, and action is understood as a form of production. This collapse is evident in medieval Latin, which renders both *poiesis* and *praxis* as *actio*.¹⁴ Aquinas does distinguish two kinds of action, one pertaining to production and one to action *qua* action. Yet his distinction, as Bernard Lonergan notes, is between “the *actio* of moral conduct, which is a perfection of the agent, and the *actio*, more properly *factio*, which transforms external matter.”¹⁵ Aquinas’ translation of *praxis* as *factio* ascribes “actions done” to the same framework as “things made,” thereby ascribing to *praxis* the same process by which a thing is produced. In this technical definition, action is a mode of fabrication, meaning that the practical sphere is understood as a technical sphere in which preestablished moral principles are applied to human behavior. In Aquinas’ words, “action implies nothing more than order of origin, in so far as action proceeds from some cause or principle to what is from that principle.”¹⁶ Action is not conceived of as the result of a process of deliberation but as *techné*,

which means that it originates from a cause or principle that provides the necessary and sufficient conditions for its being.

Understanding action wholly in terms of *techne* expresses what Dewey describes as the technalized imagination. Dewey argues that the technalized imagination buffers the two variables involved in thinking—the agent and that which is acted on—from one another. Ideas are separated from the agent, and the task of the practical use of reason becomes that of legislating action according to universal laws. In this framework, mind is separate from body, meaning that action is pure, stemming from a single intention located in the agent. Action is not an end in itself but rather an artifact, the realization of a pre-given end in the material order. The temporality of action is thus a problem, for the coexistence of cause, action, and effect in the moment of deliberation in Aristotle's *praxis* must be replaced with a model where action takes place after the cause (i.e., as a result of some rule) but before the presence of the effect.¹⁷

More than four centuries after Aquinas, René Descartes presents a scientific-technical reading of Aristotle in *The Principles of Philosophy* (1644). Echoing Aquinas' argument in the *Summa Theologica* that in "the natural order, perfection comes before imperfection,"¹⁸ Descartes argues that the natural order is grounded in original perfection: "I do not doubt that the world was created in the beginning with all the perfection which it now possesses, because, taking into account the omnipotence of God, we must believe that everything He created was perfect in every way."¹⁹ Descartes' natural theology reproduces Aquinas' notion of original perfection, thereby providing a mechanistic explanation of a nature that unfolds according to a First Principle. This explanation requires no reference to teleology. It does not, however, entail that appeals to teleology are unhelpful. He continues by saying that teleology can better explain the development of living things than appeals to original design: to understand the "nature of plants or men it is better by far to consider how they can gradually grow from seeds than how they were created by God in the very beginning of the world."²⁰ The natural scientific approach to nature is not incompatible with original design, for Descartes, for both presume the existence of pre-defined laws laid down by an original creator.

Descartes finds no contradiction in providing two different explanations of the same facts, one that involves theoretical knowledge of the original cause (God's original act of creation) and one that begins with the senses, for, like Aquinas, he understands the natural order in terms of the First Principle. While theology claims access to the First Principle, natural

philosophy *observes* the emergence of the First Principle in the material order. The task of natural philosophy, however, is not simply to describe this process of emergence but to find “several principles which are quite intelligible and quite simple” that might explain how an original seed or First Principle causes the appearances gathered by the senses, that is, to locate in our sensory experience of nature clear and distinct principles.²¹ It is precisely these principles that Newton attempts to lay down in *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, principles that outline the mathematics of causality in order to explain the behavior of all natural phenomena.

For Leibniz, however, Descartes’ causal conception of nature and ends restricts God’s gracious care for the creation, casting God as a divine watchmaker who creates once and for all in a similar way to Plato’s demiurge. According to Leibniz, the problematic nature of Descartes’ conception of nature is manifest in his inability to harmonize mind and body. By rendering mind as *res cogitans* and body as *res extensa*, Descartes requires a mechanical explanation of how the two substances can interact. For mind to interact with matter, it must somehow enter the realm of causation (via the pineal gland), thereby submitting to the causal limits of nature. Thus God’s gracious care for God’s creation must submit to the order determined by mechanical philosophy. The kingdom of grace is subordinated to the kingdom of law to ensure the clarity and distinction of our ideas of nature.

Leibniz was critical of the subordinate position of grace in Descartes’ solution. Thus he put forward an alternative position that identifies a preestablished harmony of mind and body, separating spirit and flesh so that the two modes of explanation—nature and grace—could coexist harmoniously. In §79 of *Monadology* (1714) he states that souls act “according to the laws of final causes,” while bodies act “according to the laws of efficient causes or of motions.”²² While two kingdoms remain eternally separated, they are “in harmony with each other.” For Leibniz, the mind or soul operates according to particular ends that are explainable in terms of final causation, while the actions of the body, instances of matter in motion according to the claims of mechanical philosophy, are explained in terms of efficient causation. Though this is “impossible,” for souls act as if there were no bodies and bodies as if there were no souls, “both act *as if* each influenced the other.”²³

By separating soul and body into two realms, Leibniz allows natural philosophy to use both efficient and final causation as harmonious, albeit contradictory, forms of explanation. Thus the construction of a metaphysical system such as that put forward in the *Monadology* is the first task of science if the empirical observation of the mechanical order is to harmonize

with final causation. For Leibniz, the great foundation for such a system is mathematics, which gives us the principle of identity: “that a proposition cannot be true and false at the same time.” This single principle “is sufficient to demonstrate every part of arithmetic and geometry, that is, all mathematical principles.” Yet in order to proceed from mathematics to natural philosophy, another principle is required: “the *principle of sufficient reason*, namely, that nothing happens without a reason why it should be so rather than other wise.”²⁴ The principle of sufficient reason reproduces Aquinas’ rejection of the distinction between *poiesis* and *praxis*, for it entails a world in which every action and event can be explained according to a pre-given rule. It guarantees the rational structure of nature and establishes philosophy as the queen of the sciences, allowing the transition of mathematical principles from the theoretical order to the sensory inquiry of nature.

In order to accommodate the empirical sciences into philosophy’s conception of knowledge, Christian Wolff reproduces Leibniz’s dualistic account of experience by outlining a system of metaphysics in which there are two modes of knowledge, one consisting of passively received sense impressions, the other of understanding. Both constitute ways by which we can reach knowledge of the truth, yet they remain separate, one higher than the other. Sensory input, on its own, cannot yield knowledge of nature or order, for the principles required to convert sensory experience into knowledge—such as the principle of sufficient reason—belong to the intellect. Yet when “understanding is added,” Wolff states, “the same ideas become distinct.”²⁵ In other words, while experience lets us know that something is, it “does not see how it is connected with other truths,” for in knowledge from experience “there is no reason.”²⁶ Wolff concludes that “experience is opposed to reason,” for each provides a different level of clarity and distinctness. If we are to gain knowledge of the sensory order, experience is certainly required, but it must yield to reason.

The generation dilemma

As the empirical sciences developed in sophistication and complexity, Leibniz and Wolff continued to privilege the clarity and distinctness of the cognition of nature over the confusion of sensory experience. However, their attempt to maintain a rationalist foundation for scientific inquiry came under strain during the mid-eighteenth century, particularly in light of the developing life sciences. This tension is captured in the debate over the

nature of organic generation. On one side of the debate stood defendants of the traditional, preexistence conception of nature advocated by Descartes, in which the form of organic matter was directly created by God. On the other side, advocates of a new preformationist conception of nature argued that while original members of kinds were divinely created, they were endowed with the capacity to generate others occurring to natural laws. In the preexistence conception of nature, changeless order can be grasped by observation and converted into distinct ideas through speculation, for the present organization of genus and species expresses God's original act of creation. In the preformationist conception, science requires a new method capable of grasping connections and tracing the historical development of different species from an original genus. Building on the British tradition of experimental philosophy, the preformationists held speculation in contempt. In their view, speculation occludes the veracity of empirical facts, for it raises natural contingency into thought in order to fix it in the garb of changeless form. The preformationist research program thus posed a fundamental challenge to the primacy of metaphysics over empirical observation, threatening to efface the impassable boundary between the Leibnizean spheres of nature and grace.²⁷

Preformationism rapidly became the leading paradigm in the life sciences, and by the mid-1700s it had split into two camps. In one camp, advocates of individual preformation fought over the location of the divine preformed germ; ovists such as Albrecht von Haller and Charles Bonnet believed the female egg to be the germ, while animalculists such as Nicolaas Hartsoeker located it in the male sperm.²⁸ While they differ over the germ's present location, both the ovists and the animalculists postulate an original organization that, as Peter McLaughlin describes, "explained why only those of the physically possible particle combinations that actually exist were chosen by the Creator in the beginning."²⁹ God's original creative act establishes a First Principle that determines all possible forms, thus advancing a mechanical view of the world that unfolds according to an efficient principle. In the other camp, advocates of an epigenetic form of preformationism—such as Pierre-Louis Maupertuis; Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon; and John Needham—argued that the form of a living thing comes into existence at its birth. The parts do not determine the whole, but rather the whole gives the proper form for the generation of the parts. In an epigenetic conception of nature, new form is created wherever there is life, meaning that the world is infused with spontaneous self-propagation. The idea of natural spontaneity poses a radical challenge to both the preexistence and

individual preformationist theories, for it presupposes a concept of nature that cannot be fully explained by the efficient causative paradigms. While members of the plant and animal kingdoms were initially formed by God, they were endowed with the capacity to generate others and dynamically respond to their environments; thus they are genuinely self-organizing. Form and matter do not rest in two different spheres of experience, for matter expresses form.³⁰

In *Histoire Naturelle* (1749), Buffon made a decisive argument in favor of the epigenetic account of preformationism. He proposed that the life sciences require a new procedure for thinking about the concepts used to categorize nature, a procedure he called “natural history.”³¹ In contrast to the British tradition of natural history inspired by Francis Bacon, which takes the present appearance of animal and plant species as an expression of God’s original creation, Buffon examines the existence of order in terms of human schematization. While the natural world appears to us as “Cosmos,” an ordered whole where all that might possibly exist does exist, schematic order is a subjective result of the workings of the human mind rather than an imitation of objectively existing form. Thus an appropriate method must begin with self-limitation, withholding our desire to impose categorical and quantitative distinctions in order to discern the nuances and gradations of historical development. Buffon’s argument for a new methodology further problematizes the primacy of metaphysics in natural philosophy, for it implies that if we begin from concepts, our empirical analysis merely conforms to the concepts we use. In other words, our conceptual vantage on the world is not disinterested, giving an objective account of how the world “really is.” Rather, it discloses an ordered Cosmos according to the interests of human cognition. If we presume that nature organizes itself according to the concepts of genus and species, for example, then the existence of genus and species is precisely what we find.

Buffon aimed his account of the schematizing activity of cognition at the influential method of the botanist Carl Linnaeus that became popular in France during the 1740s. Linnaeus developed a novel taxonomic theory that understood the present members of the plant and animal kingdoms to have arisen by descent from a few original forms that were created in an original garden. This system followed Aristotle’s taxonomy, relying on just a few “artificial” characteristics, such as being warm or cold blooded, and reproducing oviparously or viviparously. Buffon argues that while these artificial systems are economical, they lead to serious errors in classification. Linnaeus’ systematic arrangement of organisms by essential characteristics

does not give the order of nature, but merely an arbitrarily order imposed by the mind.³² Thus Buffon contends that Linnaeus' attempt to provide an encyclopedic taxonomy of plant life fails to question the mental schema that make such an attempt possible.³³ To provide an alternative, Buffon calls for a new "quality of spirit" that will open a method for the natural sciences that has philosophical grounding:

Here there is need for a new methodological approach to guide the mind, not that artificial method of which we have spoken [that of Linnaeus], for that only serves to arrange words arbitrarily, but for that method which sustains the very order of things. . . . Even in our own century, when the sciences seem to be cultivated with care, I believe that it is easy to perceive that philosophy is neglected, perhaps more so than in any other century. The skills which one would call scientific have taken its place. . . . We pay hardly any attention to the fact that all these skills are only the scaffolding of science, and not science itself.³⁴

Buffon's attempt to reinvigorate the importance of philosophy to scientific inquiry became something of a call to arms for Kant, Caspar Friedrich Wolff, and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. Buffon argues that his proposal for a new philosophical method "makes us capable of grasping distant relationships, bringing them together, and making out of them a body of reasoned ideas."³⁵ To "combine" observations, he explains, is to link "them together by the power of analogy, and the effort to arrive at a high degree of knowledge."³⁶ This analogical method does not begin from the categories we already possess in order to explain what appears in nature. Rather, it begins from phenomena; that is, it begins without a concept and aims to bring the chaotic appearances together in order to create ideas for the interests of human cognition. These ideas are "reasoned," but they emerge from experience. Such a procedure is both empirical *and* rational, for it begins with phenomena and then searches for a concept. While Buffon did not push the theory of epigenesis as far as Wolff and Blumenbach, who held that organic life begins with unstructured matter and self-forming powers, he nevertheless realized the challenge that epigenesis posed to rationalist philosophy. If research into organic processes reveals natural agency, then natural history would have to commit itself to the principle that nature is susceptible to change. Yet if we consider nature in terms of change, then Descartes' two explanations of natural events cannot

rest side-by-side, one higher and the other lower. Rather, they come into an irresolvable antinomy.

We can set out the antinomy by using Descartes' reference to seeds. If a tree in its final state is different from its initial state as a seed, then there will be some features of a tree that are different from the seed. The question is what relationship those features of the tree bear to the seed. If the novel features of the tree are already present implicitly, but not apparently, in the seed, then they are not actually new but are derived from an original order. However, if the novel features are *not* to be found in the seed, then they must be contingent and thus unexplained. In this formulation it seems that the tree is either inexplicable in relation to the seed, or it is not really a development from the seed at all.

To suggest that organic life is subject to change is to radically alter the goal of describing nature. Change produces variation, which, if we take it as expressive of an organism's actual being, means that the task of natural history is not simply taxonomy but also genealogy.³⁷ As Kant later notes in a distinctly Buffonian style, the categories of genus and species only have a meaningful difference when we undertake the "description of nature" (*Naturbeschreibung*).³⁸ From the view of "natural history" (*Naturgeschichte*), on the other hand, genus and species both refer to the same phenomenon of natural descent; they are useful categories that bring order to the chaotic mass of natural phenomena. For Buffon, natural history is not merely a study of objects but also a self-reflective inquiry into our own faculty of categorization. Categories such as genus and species enable us to see more than there is in the information delivered by our senses.

Buffon argued that his nominalist approach to classification does not entail a chaotic conception of nature, for the fact that we have categories at all suggests that nature is highly amenable to systematization. If we are to recognize the contingency of our understanding of nature without collapsing into chaos, however, we cannot think of nature purely in terms of efficient causation. Instead, we must think of nature as an organic whole that organizes itself according to some kind of Aristotelian teleology. While Buffon refrained from illuminating the living dimension of nature as a whole in *Histoire Naturelle*, Casper Friedrich Wolff put forward such a vitalist account in his pioneering vision of descriptive embryology. Wolff claimed that to explain the emergence of organisms from embryos, we must presume the action of a "*vis essentialis*," an organizing force closely related to Aristotle's notion of entelechy.³⁹ This force is nothing like that which we find in Newton's *Mathematical Principles*. Rather, it is a metaphor for the internal

tendency of embryos to grow and realize themselves. In the paradigm of final causation, form (such as genus and species) does not dwell in nature in the paradigm of Leibnizian monadology. In Leibniz's conception of the monad, soul and body dwell harmoniously together in impassable spheres. Instead, the form of nature is expressed by what appears as nature unfolding according to its own inner purpose. In other words, the soul is the expression of the body. Thus sensation *and* reason are required to judge a body's purpose, and the act of judgment is a matter of codetermination where both subject (the observer) and object (the observed) are actively involved. This view is much closer to Aristotle's form/matter distinction than Leibnizian metaphysics, for it entails that when matter is in motion, the cause of its coming-to-be (its form) is expressed in the movement of its parts.⁴⁰

As anatomists and embryologists such as Buffon and Wolff became increasingly aware of the creative dimension of cognition, the realm of art—and Aristotle's theory of art in particular—gained a new significance in the task of exploring the nature of experience. If thought is free from natural constraints and gives order to experience according to categories of its own devising, such as genus and species, then we might say that it has an "artistic" dimension, crafting an image of nature that is more than the data given by the senses. *Histoire Naturelle* itself gives testament to this understanding of experience, for it reads more like a romantic novel than a scientific treatise. If experience involves an artistic dimension, then the task of science cannot simply be to outline a theoretical account of nature's first principles, for the end of nature is emergent rather than pre-given. Nature without theoretical reason is not mere chaos, for, as Buffon observes, it works toward creating order in a way amenable to reasoned inquiry.

In *Histoire Naturelle*, Buffon calls for a new procedure by which to navigate contingent, sensory experience, one that is both creative and reasoned. Because natural history begins from nature's self-expression, a new spirit of inquiry is required that does not seek to imitate a stable foundation but begins from the products of nature in order to discern their inner purpose. When science is no longer understood as imitation but as a creative project, a new conception of the agency of both the scientist and nature is required. In the following two sections I examine the attempts to build such a conception of agency by rationalist and empiricist philosophers. While rationalists like Baumgarten elucidate the importance of a sensuous cognition that nonetheless remains subordinate to reason, it is empiricists such as Hume and Moore who understand this new kind of cognition in relation to reason. In the following sections I suggest that it is this empiri-

cal move that brings the artistic genre of tragedy into the field of concern. However, while the empiricists become concerned with the problematic of tragedy, it is not until philosophers such as Young and Herder proffer a third alternative, one that draws from *both* rationalism and empiricism, that the full importance of the tragedies can be seen.

The rationalist response

As an increasing number of prominent biologists began to adopt epigenetic preformationism, it seemed to many that the hegemony of metaphysics over the natural sciences was reaching an end and that a new way of thinking about the natural world was required. Some biologists such as Haller and Bonnet reacted against Buffon, aiming to strengthen the individual preformationist position by developing an active theory of matter that remained subject to preestablished principles. Philosophers who remained committed to rationalism also sought new ways to account for the role of experience within a mechanical concept of nature.

Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, a student of Christian Wolff, attempted to reestablish the primacy of philosophy by calling for a systematic study of the means by which we acquire and express sensory knowledge. In this study, Baumgarten sought to find an objective validity for sensuous thought and a claim to truth that was equal to cognition.⁴¹ While he retained Descartes and Wolff's distinction between the higher and lower faculties, he explored the faculty of sensuous knowledge in the attempt to provide a rational foundation for empirical science. Baumgarten termed this science "aesthetics," defining its parameters in the opening paragraph of the *Aesthetica* (1750) as "the theory of the liberal arts, the lesser theory of knowledge, the art of thinking beautifully, the art of reason by analogy."⁴² Aesthetics takes the form of "the science of sensuous cognition," that is, an inquiry into the nature and limits of the rationality expressed in sensory experience.

Baumgarten claims that just as logic is concerned with the operations of reason and the understanding, the new discipline of aesthetics ought to be a legitimate part of philosophical inquiry concerned with what we apprehend through the senses.⁴³ Through giving attention to individual appearances, he argues that the goal of Wolffian science—distinct ideas—comes at a significant cost: by subsuming an individual appearance beneath a concept or by enumerating its attributes, anything that exceeds our capacity

of understanding is excluded from the purview of legitimate science. In Baumgarten's terms, "the specific formal perfection contained in cognition and logical truth had to be bought dearly by a great and significant loss of material perfection. For what else is abstraction than a loss?"⁴⁴ Wolff's understanding of philosophy privileges logical form over sensuous appearance, which requires the abstraction of form from sensory experience. For Baumgarten, while this method guarantees clear and distinct knowledge, it only provides a partial and impoverished perspective of the world. On its own, theoretical knowledge cannot "reach the knowledge of the truth"—the very task it is meant to achieve—for it remains separate from the empirical sphere, the very sphere in which truth is meant to be operative.⁴⁵ Opposed to Wolff's constrained picture of reason, Baumgarten advances the field of aesthetics as an exercise in our capacity to grasp reality in its particularity and complexity, drawing what exceeds logical systematization into philosophy's field of concern.

In order to outline his account of sensuous cognition, Baumgarten turns to art. Art provides an alternative kind of synthesis to the marriage of concepts and appearances in the mind, for it does not work with abstractions (it does not proceed from concept to appearance) but with the totality of an organism (from appearance to concept). An artwork is produced by the collaboration of the sensuous, imaginative, and intellectual faculties, meaning that it is both an interaction with the world we experience *and* the synthesis of this material with intellectual ideas. In this view, the synthesis afforded in art cannot be understood in the Platonic terms of *mimesis*, for it is utterly new and unprecedented in every case. Yet as an operation that involves the understanding, it is a mode of knowledge—of truth—for through sensuous cognition we come to learn about the world in its complexity. In this framework truth does not preexist cognition but is a cognitive activity of the subject. If art is such a synthesis, then, as Aristotle claims in *Poetics*, the study of art will shed light on the complexities of human nature and experience to the fullest degree. Moreover, art history will be the locus for a new philosophical study in anthropology, just as natural history becomes a kind of genealogy for Buffon. Sensuous cognition is temporal, expressing a particular experience that is radically opposed to the abstractions of timeless being. If artworks have rules, they are not objective necessities or natural regularities. Rather, they are the products of human freedom.

While Baumgarten attempts to establish the philosophical legitimacy of sensuous experience, he does not break with the rationalist mind/body split of Wolffian philosophy. Thus he remains unable to ground an indepen-

dent science of human sensibility, for his notion of truth remains monopolized by the higher cognitive faculty, that is, the understanding. Theoretical matters, such as logic and ethics, are held apart from sensory matters, leaving no path for empirical observation to connect to matters of human being or moral philosophy in a way that could defy the attacks of skepticism.⁴⁶ In other words, by remaining committed to rationalist metaphysics, Baumgarten's philosophy entails an account of aesthetic judgment exempt from the constraints of cognition. The problem opened by Baumgarten's aesthetics is how sense and reason might be harmonized.

The empiricist response

In "On the Standard of Taste" (1757), David Hume posits an alternative account of the connection between sense and reason to Baumgarten's aesthetics. To do so, he attacks a certain "species of philosophy" to which Baumgarten remains committed, one that destroys the possibility of aesthetic agreement by separating experience from reason. This species, of course, is rationalism. In such a species of philosophy, "all sentiment is right; because sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself." When it comes to reason, however, "all determinations of the understanding are not right; because they have a reference to something beyond themselves, to wit, real matter of fact."⁴⁷ Hume's caricature aims to show that rationalists are committed to the idea that sentiment is subjective, and thus philosophically deficient, and that the understanding is objective and thus the proper faculty of philosophy. Not even Baumgarten breaks from this view, for he maintains that reason gives fact while the senses give subjective impressions. To provide an alternative, Hume turns to the concept of taste.

Hume's notion of taste is a sensuous measure that is not purely subjective but, rather, operates in accord with reason. Unlike the rationalist conception of sentiment, Hume argues that taste follows empirical (*a posteriori*) rules acquired through experience. Taste is not reducible to reason, however, for while reason makes claims about matters of fact, taste involves the measure of *sensation*. While reason appeals to the nature of things, taste is productive; Hume notes that the rules it follows are not "*a priori*," "eternal," or "immutable" but share a foundation with the "natural sciences."⁴⁸ This foundation is "experience." Poetry, for example, is confined by the "rules of art," rules discovered by the author "either by genius or observation." Genius, for Hume, involves the production of rules that are

made publically available by sensuous communication. Observation, on the other hand, involves the experience of artworks whereby one's mind is furnished with the rules appropriate to a given genre. Thus Hume provides an alternative to the rationalist tradition by identifying a sensuous mode of cognition that does not collapse into subjectivism. Taste provides a shared "standard"—a set of *a posteriori* rules—for "confirming one sentiment, and condemning another."

Hume first outlined this argument in *Treatise on Human Nature* (1739–1740) by linking beauty to aesthetic feeling. Here he states that "feeling constitutes our praise or admiration," which is to say that feeling or sentiment *is* the beauty of the artwork.⁴⁹ Beauty is not the participation in the First Principle, as it was for Aquinas, and neither is it in the artwork itself. Rather, the "immediate" sentiment produced by the observer is the source of value we call beauty; taste, in this sense, sets value into motion. While reason "conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood," taste "gives the sentiment of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue."⁵⁰ In other words, while reason discovers objects "as they really stand in nature," taste "has a productive faculty [giving rise to] a new creation." What Hume seems to be saying is that while reason is concerned with knowledge, meaning that it is limited to nature, taste is concerned with aesthetics and virtue, meaning that it goes *beyond* nature: it is productive, though not in the paradigm of *techne*, which produces according to preestablished rules. The products of taste take the status of a new creation, extending beyond the material given by nature in order to construct a collective sense shared by a community. As soon as we have a productive notion of taste, we have departed from the rationalist conception of nature in which creation is monopolized by the original act of the creator.

While Hume's notion of taste provides a subjective account of sentiment that retains a common standard, he refuses to harmonize reason and taste. Thus he inherits a particular problem from rationalism, namely, how to explain the pleasure found in artworks that are *disagreeable* to the observer. This problem becomes evident in his essay "Of Tragedy," where he attempts to explain the pleasure that "a well-written tragedy" affords by producing "sorrow, terror and anxiety" and other naturally disagreeable emotions.⁵¹ To provide an explanation Hume must outline how the disagreeable sentiment we feel at the transgression of order can be converted into an agreeable sentiment if sensation is disconnected from thought (if it is "immediate"). He builds on the thought of French playwright Jean-Baptiste Dubos, who defended the significance of tragedy as a constituent of moral development. For Dubos, "tragedy excites and cherishes the good passions, but raises

abhorrence at the vicious and wicked passions. ⁵² Yet Dubos' defense of tragedy does not ultimately assist Hume's case, for it raises the question of how tragedy can excite the good passions if it presents scenes that ought to occasion a negative response, such as performances that elucidate the frustration and failure of moral intentions. Hume argues that any emotion that "attends a passion, is easily converted into it, though in their nature they be originally different from, and even contrary to, each other."⁵³ Because the passions are not caused by facts about the world, such as order or disorder, but are "new creations," tragedy manifests the ability of art to "convert" one passion (such as displeasure) into another (pleasure).

However, because he insists that the passions or sentiments must remain separated from reason, Hume is unable to give a clear account of how or why such a conversion from a disagreeable to an agreeable sentiment occurs. If sentiment and reason are radically separate—one a spontaneous creation and the other a constrained, calculative procedure—the process of taking pleasure in the suffering of another on stage is no different from taking pleasure in another's *actual* suffering. In other words, and according to this paradigm, it illuminates a flaw in moral taste. As Hume states in "On the Standard of Taste," writers who present the collapse of order "have not pleased *by* their transgressions of rule or order, but *in spite of* these transgressions: they have possessed other beauties, which were conformable to just criticism."⁵⁴ Thus the standard for judging a tragedy relies on its ability to condemn vice without presenting action that is "too bloody and atrocious."⁵⁵

In *The End of Tragedy according to Aristotle* (1763), James Moor argues that both Dubos and Hume are unable to explain the "chief difficulty viz how Tragedy purifies any passion by means of exciting that very passion," for neither understand the role of reason in Aristotle's notion of *katharsis*.⁵⁶ He attributes this misunderstanding to their failure to "attend to the propriety of the [Greek] language," arguing that they render Aristotle's *pathē* and *pathēmata* as "Sufferings, or Calamities"—that is, as unfortunate *external* events—rather than as emotions occurring within the character.⁵⁷ Thus Dubos and Hume overlook the distinctively tragic dimension of the suffering presented in tragedy. When understood as unfortunate events acting *on* the character, the suffering is not tragic. It is merely misfortunate, and the reason for the transformation of emotion is unclear. When understood as emotions experienced *within* the character upon becoming aware of their own culpability in their suffering, however, the suffering presented is tragic. It involves an affective experience that clarifies our sense of things, our grasp on the magnitude of the world.

Moor's main concern with Hume's account of taste is that by separating taste from reason, Hume cannot explain how taste might be refined by reason. For Moor, the purpose of tragedy for Aristotle was to persuade the audience to remove (*katharein*) calamities (*pathēmata*) from the world "by exciting the Pity and Terror of the audience at the representation of them."⁵⁸ Understood as a properly aesthetic experience, tragedy excites pity and terror by presenting the calamities that result from our own doing, thereby reorienting our understanding of how human action coheres with nature. The end of tragedy is thus a moral and political reform by means of educating taste according to reason. The pleasure found in tragedy does not issue from sadism, but rather in the moral clarification undergone when we come to understand the nature and causes of suffering. In other words, the pleasure Aristotle locates in tragedy is intrinsically linked to *reason*, igniting our passion so as to affect a moral transformation in the spectator. Moor argues that if the French playwrights could build from this understanding of Aristotle, "the places of public resort and amusement might become some of the most agreeable and useful schools of education."⁵⁹

Moor puts forward what Poster describes as a "rhetorical-humanistic" reading of Aristotle.⁶⁰ Like Dubos and the French playwrights who attempted to restage tragedies in the modern age, Moor was clearly frustrated with the scholastic focus on Aristotle's speculative texts and emphasized the *Politics*, *Poetics*, *Rhetoric*, and ethical treatises. Yet writing against the playwrights who attempted to use *Poetics* as a textbook for creating new tragedies, he reinterprets Aristotle as a practical *philosopher*, that is, a philosopher concerned with "the productive arts and those matters about which knowledge is probable rather than certain."⁶¹

The rhetorical-humanistic reading of Aristotle draws our attention to the impossibility of designing a science about the particularities of living beings. For singular events and expressions, or in Moor's words, in matters about which knowledge is probable rather than certain, the exclusive focus on knowledge as *techné* is inadequate, for it involves a mode of production guided by principles *already* in our possession. Aristotle's account of *phronesis*, on the other hand, outlines a mode of reasoning guided by experience. *Phronesis* is not predetermined or guided by an end other than itself. Rather, it participates in the formation of nature as a shared project.⁶² By emphasizing the importance of *phronesis* for scientific and artistic thought, Moor's rereading of Aristotle shifts the emphasis of philosophy from an exclusive focus on demonstrable truth to a more expansive concern for singularities, such as living things and complex ethical dilemmas.

Moor attempts to build on Aristotle's separation of *praxis* from *poiesis*, where *poiesis* directs itself to the world according to the rules of art (*techne*) and *praxis* directs itself to the life of the collective sphere of the *polis* (*phronesis*). While *techne* operates according to rules, *phronesis* involves the creativity of thought to act apart from rules in the framework of reflection and deliberation. For the philosophers who turn to Aristotle's practical and rhetorical works to think beyond the rationalist tradition's exclusive focus on *techne*, action cannot be explained according to the rules of *techne*. It requires an alternative understanding of production, for it utters new rules into being.

Embodied mind

By separating taste from reason, and by identifying taste as the basis of value, Hume removes the universal dimension of morality and places moral philosophy at the mercy of social and cultural developments. His subjectivist understanding of aesthetic experience—that the experience of beauty, for example, is not determined by the artwork's representation of nature but is produced in the perceiver as a “new creation”—reconfigures taste as the recognition of a First Principle to a subjective, productive measure of experience. Yet divorced from reason, not only does Hume's notion of taste have few resources to resist the charge of skepticism, it also extends the rationalist bifurcation of philosophy. The challenge raised by Hume's work is whether the subjectivist experience of art can be held in relation to reason. Taste is contingent, for it involves the production of feeling that is free from the ideas of reason. Reason is necessary, for it is bound by rules.

Edward Young put forward a solution to the Humean dilemma through reexamining the notion of genius. In particular, he turned to the notion of genius in the attempt to build a new theory of creativity that could expand the direction of aesthetics beyond the disembodied soul assumed by rationalist philosophy. For Young, the neoclassical attempt to reproduce ancient Greek art was an infantile relinquishment of responsibility, which, “like Crutches, are a needful aid to the lame, tho' an impediment to the str ong.”⁶³ Classical art should not provide the standard of aesthetic beauty but should rather inspire the same creative power in modern art. Young provides a model of such creativity in his lengthy poem *Night Thoughts* (1742). In the self-reflective preface he wrote to the poem,

he outlines his novel understanding of poetry and the moral implications of sensuous experience. "As the occasion of this Poem was real, not fictitious," he states, "so the method pursued in it was rather imposed by what spontaneously arose in the Author's mind on that occasion, than meditated or designed."⁶⁴ While "common poetry" usually consists of "long narrations to draw short morals," Young argues that in his poem "the narrative is short, and the morality arising from it makes the bulk of the Poem." This is for the simple reason that "the facts mentioned did naturally pour these moral reflections on the thought of the Writer." Young's poem had a significant impact on philosophy's understanding of artistic creation, most notably on Edmund Burke who found in it the impetus for his reflections on the beautiful and the sublime in *Night Thoughts*. Young does not portray a rule-governed morality, yet neither does he equate morality and taste. Rather, he presents a sensuous experience that gives rise to significant moral implications: an experience of nature that pours moral reflections into thought.

Young's *Night Thoughts* elevates the genius as a second Creator, a Promethean figure who imitates neither the ancients nor his contemporaries but rather presents his own experience of nature in such a way that opens the reader to the realm of ideas. By opening the realm of ideas in the midst of experience, genius shifts the disembodied soul of Baumgarten's aesthetics in the direction of what we might call, following Angelica Nuzzo, an "embodied mind," developing an anthropology in which sensuous cognition and reason can be seen as part of the same science.⁶⁵ As Young suggests in the preface to *Night Thoughts*, the experience of nature prompts a sensuous morality that occupies the bulk of the poem. As he draws out in his critical work *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), the genius creates intuitively and cannot explain his or her work through reference to antecedents. Thus the work of the genius is not mechanical, but organic: "An Original may said to be of a vegetable nature; it rises spontaneously from the vital root of Genius; it grows, it is not made."⁶⁶ Genius is organic not because it unfolds according a First Principle but because it creates new form. Because it is the work of nature in the subject, genius bypasses the Wolffian dualism of sense and intellect and expresses a more original comporment to nature, for it is at once natural (theoretical) and spontaneous (practical). This conception of nature is not exhausted by mathematical principles, for it pours *new* thought into the poet that lies outside the boundaries of the understanding. Yet it is not chaotic. Rather, nature is productive in the framework of the artist, for it expresses indeterminate form. It does not

simply follow rules but also *gives* rules. It does not unfold according to preestablished form but *creates* form.

Young's *Conjectures* was published in two separate German translations in 1760 and had a significant impact on Schelling, Schiller, Herder, and the *Sturm und Drang* movement. Significantly, Young modeled his account of genius on Shakespeare, bringing Shakespeare's work to the attention of German aesthetics. Herder's essay "Shakespeare" (1773) grapples with Young's poetry and critical work, focusing on the difference between Shakespearean tragedy and Greek tragedy in order to highlight the historical significance of genius. His notion of genius provides a significant contribution to Young's, for it introduces a culturally bound element to the genius of poetic creation. According to Herder, while poetic genius is universal, for it is true to the atemporality of nature, the manner in which it expresses itself must be understood in terms of the history and context in which it emerges. This gives a new meaning to the notion of artistic genre. Genre is not timeless form; it is created by a transgressive work that utters new form into being. Thus understood, Greek and Shakespearean tragedy are, despite continuities, two distinct genres; they were created under vastly different conditions and are guided by and establish different rules.

The significance of Young's account of artistic genius for Herder is that it provides a way of thinking that does not equate taste with reason, which might undermine reason's universal status, but *harmonizes* them. It identifies the appearance of what Leibniz called the theoretical sphere—the sphere of reason—in the aesthetic sphere. Herder considers the creativity expressed by the tragic poets as a way of understanding this harmonization. In the account he gives of the original creation of tragedy, he states that Aeschylus "enlarged" and "recast" the "improptu dithyramb, the mimed dance, the chorus," putting two actors on stage instead of one, thereby "inventing" the concept of the protagonist and "reducing" the role of the chorus.⁶⁷ Following Aeschylus, Sophocles built on Aeschylus' radical creativity by adding a third actor and introducing scene painting.⁶⁸ In this account of tragedy's origins, Herder makes it clear that the concept of the protagonist does not "emerge" from some unfolding principle but is rather "invented" by Aeschylus through his creative reproduction of inherited content in new form. In other words, Aeschylus and Sophocles contribute to the creation of the tragic genre through a series of ruptures, yet each rupture expresses a new rule that governs artistic practice. This is why Greek and Shakespearean tragedy constitute two different expressions of artistic genius and cannot be judged according to a universal set of

rules, or used to derive those rules: both *establish* the rule by which they were to be judged.

Herder harmonizes Hume's notion of taste with contemporary discussions of genius, arguing that genius is the creative expression of nature in the sensuous domain. Through genius, reason disciplines taste. Because genius is a creative expression that has meaning in the context of the community from which it breaks, it can be understood to give an orientation, a common mode of sense, to a people. Herder states that taste "is at last nothing but *truth and goodness in a beautiful and sensuous form, understanding and virtue in an immaculate garb fit for humanity*."⁶⁹ This is to say that taste is the incarnation of the transcendentals, reconciling reason with sensuous life.⁷⁰ The transcendentals are no longer eternal forms that are forever separated from sensuous life but products of nature—expressed by genius—that schematize cognition. If taste is the supreme organizing principle, then art displaces (rationalist) philosophy as the activity that is most adequate for generating an understanding of life, for it is able to grasp life as a whole, including what lies beyond the understanding, by means of analogy.⁷¹ If every appearance in nature and history is singular, meaning that such appearances cannot be explained by derivation from a First Principle, then only poetry, myth, and story—in short, only analogical thinking—can do justice to life.

Herder's work highlights the ability of analogical thinking to respond to Buffon's call for a "quality of spirit" that looks at the phenomena of life and gathers it together without requiring it to conform to preestablished criteria. Rather than constructing a completed system, analogical thinking reframes philosophy as an ongoing project of self-understanding that is necessarily incomplete. It provides a new procedure for thinking that is capable of attaining a greater understanding of ourselves as physical and intellectual beings than rationalist philosophy affords, for it draws the whole of our experience together without the disembodied requirements of clarity and distinction. Moreover, it allows us to undertake the task of understanding nature not from the abstraction of the theoretical philosopher but from *within* nature, for it refuses to subject phenomenological experience to theoretical, abstracted explanation. If we conceptualize the coexistence of mind and world as machine and spirit, for example, then we render the subject incoherent from the very start. If we begin from our *feeling* of the unity of life, as does the author of a play or the creative botanist, we are able to judge body and mind as parts of a living organism, where an organizing power integrates the physical powers it possesses. This judgment is not made possible by theoretical philosophy but by one who is invested

in experience. Herder concludes that without a feeling of the unity of sense and reason, reason is but “an idle spectator,” and without reason, “taste will never reach maturity.”⁷² Without a feeling of the unity of sense and reason, reason “calls out in vain.”

In the following chapters I suggest that, while writing his third *Critique*, Kant drew elements from Herder’s notion of analogical thinking in order to navigate the problematic separation of the theoretical and practical spheres outlined in his earlier critical work. Kant came to recognize that the exclusive determination of truth in terms of clarity and distinctness entails that, from the outset, rationalist philosophy is destined to fail in its attempt to harmonize reason with sensuous life. Recognizing this failure, Kant found in Herder’s defense of analogical thinking a way of harmonizing reason and sense in the notion of taste. While he refuses to accept Herder’s claim that this harmony can restore content to the ideas of reason, insisting that the harmony of reason and sense remains always an analogy, he claims that taste regulates the function of the sense organs and drives, allowing reason to enter the sphere of nature as a guide for cognition. Thus the task of navigating philosophy’s failure to integrate reason into sensory life, for Kant, is an *aesthetic* task, requiring the cultivation of taste.⁷³

Reflective Judgment

This embarrassment about a principle . . . is found chiefly in those judgments that are called aesthetic, which concern the beautiful and the sublime in nature and in art.

—Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*

Kant opens *Critique of Judgment* by acknowledging the particular “embarrassment” (*Verlegenheit*) of aesthetic experience. Kant’s use of *Verlegenheit* here is intriguing, for it links the experience that opens his third *Critique* with one that grounds the initial impulse toward the critical enterprise. In the opening lines of *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant observes that reason constantly faces embarrassment (A viii). Despite the best efforts of philosophy, reason persistently finds itself naked and exposed as it raises questions that it cannot dismiss and yet that exceed its capacity to answer. In *Critique of Judgment*, however, it is not reason itself that is embarrassed, but the sensible application of reason via the understanding. When faced with appearances that resist the application of concepts, the understanding is foiled in its basic task: to give “the law of the synthetic unity of all appearances” (*CPR* A128). Yet the curious thing Kant discovers is that the embarrassment of the understanding does not then entail that judgment is unable to operate in aesthetic contexts. Rather, judgment is able “to provide a concept itself, through which no thing is actually cognized, but which only serves as a rule for it” (*CJ* 5:169).

While Kant does not formulate the failure of the understanding in tragic terms, comparisons between the mode of thinking that emerges from the failure of theoretical philosophy to accommodate aesthetics and the mode of thinking expressed in the tragedies had already been drawn by Moor and Herder. Moreover, it became commonplace for Kant’s successors

to interpret *Critique of Judgment* as a presentation of the failure of an exclusively technical approach to the application of reason to sensation, and that as a uniquely philosophical tragedy. While the Idealist view put forward by Szondi suggests that tragedy must be understood in the terms developed by Schelling, Hölderlin, and Hegel, I suggest in this chapter that Kant himself makes an important response to the problem that these philosophers examine in terms of a distinctly philosophical kind of tragedy. In particular, I aim to show that while Kant does not present the failure of an exclusively technical conception of judgment in terms of tragedy, his third *Critique* implicitly conceives philosophy as a tragic enterprise, the inevitable failure of the understanding to legislate the whole of nature.

Those of Kant's successors who were interested in tragedy gave special attention to the new methodology developed in *Critique of Judgment*. For these thinkers, the significance of this method is that it does not lead Kant to bolster his earlier theoretical account of judgment. Rather, it leads him to outline a new mode of judgment that authentically engages with contingent singularity. This methodology is particularly evident in his understanding of the role of reason in the sciences. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, for instance, Kant concludes his analysis of Newtonian physics through the methodological presuppositions of the completed system. In *Critique of Judgment*, however, he approaches science as a research program that is, and must remain, in motion. Because this method frames scientific discovery as an unrealized project, Kant recognizes that the systematic concern of science cannot find a basis in philosophy. Instead, he insists that the underlying coherence of the scientific system lies in aesthetic experience.

To show that *Critique of Judgment* can be viewed as a response to what later philosophers examine as the tragedy of philosophy, I begin by identifying the place of the third *Critique* in Kant's critical project. In particular, I focus on the way that Kant understood his third *Critique* as a creative and scientific discovery of the shared basis of the practical and theoretical spheres identified in his first two *Critiques*. In the second section I turn to the product of Kant's discovery: the difficult and exciting notion of reflective judgment. I give particular attention to the transcendental deduction of taste, which seeks to identify the principle that conditions the possibility of reflective judgments. This deduction identifies the basis of reflective judgment in what Kant terms the "form of purposiveness," which is to say that our experience of nature allows us to *feel* as though the natural world were fitting to our purposes and to our scientific inquiry. In the final two sections I consider the antinomy that arises between the mechanical

conception of nature outlined in the first *Critique* and the new, purposive conception of nature required by reflective judgment. Kant suggests that this antinomy bestows a kind of vitality on our thinking that forces us, despite our critical intentions, to posit the unity of reason in a supersensible substrate that the understanding cannot know but that reflection can feel, and reason think. Thus the critical system can only be completed once the failure of an exclusively technical account of judgment—the embarrassment that the understanding faces for want of a principle—has set the mind on a trajectory that leads philosophy to think the unity of nature and reason through the reflective use of judgment. This trajectory does not lead to a fully blown speculative project. Given Kant's commitment to the limits of reason, it rather shifts the emphasis of philosophy from an exclusive focus on knowledge toward a process of making sense in common.

The need for a third *Critique*

Kant began his third *Critique* upon realizing that his earlier critical work failed to reach its systematic goal. In the first two *Critiques*, Kant set a rigid distinction between the theoretical and the practical domains by building a mechanistic concept of nature and a metaphysical concept of freedom (*Critique of Pure Reason*), which he then seals in terms of practical philosophy (*Critique of Practical Reason*). The mechanistic concept of nature outlines the necessary conditions by which nature is represented in cognition. As a concept of the understanding, it is not concerned with nature as a thing in itself but with nature as an ordered appearance. Natural causality is understood as a progressive nexus of efficient causes and their effects. The metaphysical concept of freedom, on the other hand, outlines the necessary conditions for practical, moral judgments that are not subject to the domain of cause and effect but are freely determined by reason. In the third antinomy of *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant argues that “nature and transcendental freedom are as different as lawfulness and lawlessness” (CPR A446/B474–A447/B475). He proposes that the antinomy can only be solved by removing practical reason from the causal domain, from the very domain where it should be operative.

The division between the practical and natural spheres articulated in *Critique of Pure Reason* came under significant attack during the mid-1780s. Karl Leonhard Reinhold's criticisms of Kant's critical philosophy in *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy* (1786) are especially important, for they establish the objections to the critical enterprise that prompted Kant to begin writing

a third installment in the critical project. With the intention of building a more comprehensive and systematic ground to the critical system, Reinhold argues that Kant's philosophy did not fully live up to its two central ideals of criticism and science.¹ As Kant explains, the ideal of criticism demands the "purification of our reason" from errors, ensuring that philosophy is self-authorizing (*CPR* A11/B25). The ideal of science, on the other hand, requires that our "cognitions cannot at all constitute a rhapsody but must constitute a system, which alone can support and advance its essential ends" (*CPR* A831/B860). Yet Reinhold saw that on Kant's own terms the critical system remained without complete scientific form. Kant had declared that the legislation of human reason (philosophy) must encompass both the spheres of practical judgment and theoretical necessity in a "single philosophical system," drawing together nature and freedom, "everything that is" and "that which should be" (*CPR* A840/B868). Yet Reinhold insists that the only way that we can be sure that nature and freedom cohere with each other is to show that they can be traced back to the same "fundamental principle" (*Grundsatz*), which "imparts determination and internal coherence to all the metaphysical doctrinal principles."² A system with two first principles is not a system at all. The task, as Reinhold presents it, is to find an *a priori* First Principle that could encompass the entire domain of experience, and hence philosophy.

Traditionally, scholars have suggested that Reinhold's *Letters* shaped the way that Kant's contemporaries received the critical project.³ One could view Fichte's self-positing subject or Hegel's notion of the syllogism as building on Reinhold's critique of Kant in the attempt to identify the principle undergirding the practical and theoretical spheres.⁴ This reading of Idealist thought is, to a certain extent, correct, for Reinhold built the Idealist program of philosophy at Jena on the interpretation of Kant outlined in the *Letters*. However, we must be careful not to draw the lines of influence too simply, for Kant's own response to Reinhold in his third *Critique* provides an addition to the critical enterprise that deeply influenced the Idealist program. It seems that Kant did not read the *Letters* before the second *Critique* was publically available, for when he first wrote to Reinhold on December 28, 1787, to thank him for "those excellent *Letters*," he notes his intention to send a copy of *Critique of Practical Reason*.⁵ Yet despite the fact that this letter was written only a few weeks after the publication of the second *Critique*, Kant announces to Reinhold that he is writing a *third* critique in order to remedy the shortcomings of his earlier work. He explains that the process of looking back over his critical project led him "to discover

elucidations [he] had not expected. ”⁶ Due to his discovery of “a kind of *a priori* principle different from those hitherto observed,” he states that he is “now at work on the critique of taste. ” This principle alerted him to a third faculty of the mind, adding the faculty of feeling pleasure and displeasure to the faculties of cognition and desire.

Kant’s language portrays his new endeavor as both a creative search *and* a scientific discovery of a principle that would draw his bipartite system into a whole. His *Critique of Pure Reason* located *a priori* principles of the first faculty, cognition, while *Critique of Practical Reason* located principles for the third faculty, desire. Kant observes that the process of reflecting on the apparently unmediated relation between the two principles “allowed [him] to discover something systematic ” that could draw the scope of knowledge together under the banners of theoretical philosophy, teleology, and practical philosophy.⁷ Kant notes that the second, teleology, is “the least rich in *a priori* grounds of determination,” but he hopes that it will unify the critical project under the title of the “Critique of Taste.”⁸ This critique was to be ready in a matter of months, though in reality it would take him another two years to complete.

Kant provides a sharper articulation of the transformative nature of this new critique in the second introduction he wrote for the final, 1793 edition of *Critique of Judgment*. Here he declares that there is an “incalculable gulf [*unübersehbare Kluft*] fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible, so that from the former to the latter (thus by means of the theoretical use of reason) no transition is possible ” (*CJ* 5:175–176). While Leibniz saw the two sides of this gulf working harmoniously together, though never intersecting, Kant is deeply aware of the threat that it poses to the systematic nature of critical philosophy. He states that the concept of freedom *should* have an influence on the concept of nature, for it “should make the end that is imposed by its laws real in the sensible world. ” And not only should freedom influence the domain of nature, but nature *must* be able to be conceived in such a way that the “lawfulness of its form is at least in agreement with the possibility of the ends that are to be realized in it in accordance with the laws of freedom.” In other words, if the practical project is viable in lived experience, we must be able to think of nature as a place in which the laws of freedom can be realized. Building on the demand of practical reason, Kant concludes that there must be some kind of “ground” that unifies “nature with that which the concept of freedom contains practically.” This ground is the “supersensible” (*das Übersinnliche*),

the concept of which “ makes possible the transition from the manner of thinking in accordance with the principles of the one to that in accordance with the principles of the other .”

Kant’s recognition of the gulf that lies between theoretical and practical reason is not unique to *Critique of Judgment*. Indeed, he recognized the strain that his separation of the theoretical and practical spheres placed on critical philosophy in both his first and second *Critiques*. In the first *Critique*, Kant deemed it necessary to keep each domain separate so as to seal the purity of reason against movements in philosophy that privilege aesthetic taste over theoretical reason, such as that put forward by Herder.⁹ In the second *Critique* he concedes that theoretical reason can borrow propositions from practical reason in the form of “ postulates” (*CPrR* 5:122). While the solution put forward in the second *Critique* may have been more satisfactory to Reinhold, who aimed to identify the fundamental principle of scientific thinking in practical reason, Kant’s notion of postulates does not ultimately provide an answer to the problem of transferability, for they are neither provable nor known. Something major shifts between the publication of the second *Critique* in 1787 and the third *Critique* in 1790, for Kant suddenly found the need to provide an answer, one that appeals to human beings not simply as moral but also as sensuous creatures. Thus in the third *Critique* Kant searches for an alternative way of thinking about the viability of morality in nature. The aim of his critique of taste is to identify a bridge that would allow one to move across the gulf that his own critical philosophy had deemed necessary. This bridge lies in his notoriously difficult notion the supersensible.

The supersensible is the ground that unifies the practical and the theoretical domains, confirming the viability of the moral project in nature. It provides a more expansive basis to the critical project than Kant had previously allowed, for it draws the law-giving activity of reason and the purposiveness of nature into a systematic harmony. Yet a problem arises given the limits of critical philosophy, for “ the idea [of the supersensible] itself can never be raised up and expanded into a cognition ” (*CJ* 5:175). Given the Copernican Revolution in the domain of knowledge—the idea that we cannot have a God’s-eye view of the world—the occurrence of the supersensible must be a schematism, that is, a finite production of the imagination.¹⁰ In other words, the supersensible is not a source of knowledge (*Wissen*) but an aid to human self-understanding. While in terms of epistemology it remains outside the bounds of cognition, Kant argues that we enjoy its presence in aesthetic feeling, in particular, in the feeling of pleasure we experience in judgments of beauty.

Jürgen Habermas suggests that Kant's search for the *a priori* of taste aims to unify epistemology, moral culture, and aesthetic culture as three separate domains, each containing its own *a priori*.¹¹ This reading of Kant's project entails that Kant's goal in writing the third *Critique* is to strengthen the critical enterprise against Reinhold's critique and, more importantly, to seal the authority of critical philosophy over Herder and the *Sturm und Drang* movement. The third *Critique* thus aims to place philosophy "as the highest court of appeal vis-à-vis the sciences and culture as a whole."¹² Habermas casts Kant's argument in *Critique of Judgment* as an attempt to bolster critical philosophy against the threat of tragedy, understood as the failure of the understanding to legislate the whole of nature, for he suggests that instead of allowing the failure of his earlier approach to philosophy to transform the aspirations of his project, Kant attempts to give further buffering to the critical enterprise against the threat posed by the appeal to teleology in the life sciences. He states that Kant's aim in *Critique of Judgment* is not to provide a new procedure for philosophy that priorizes human action, but to superimpose "the ahistoricity of the conceptual system . . . on culture," thereby granting philosophy the "role of judge, parcelling out separate areas of jurisdiction to science, morality, and art."¹³

Habermas is unwilling to concede that Kant's effort to unify the concepts of nature and freedom through reference to a "shared ground" transforms the direction of the critical enterprise. He holds that Kant merely insists a fixed foundation underneath both spheres. In what follows I argue that Habermas' reading of Kant is untenable, for Kant's account of aesthetic experience does not leave the concepts of nature and freedom unaltered. Rather, building on John Zammito's work, I argue that he "completely transfigured the significance of these conventional connections."¹⁴ This transfiguration is particularly evident in Kant's response to Reinhold's two criticisms in *Critique of Judgment*. He responds to the charge of failing the demands of criticism by arguing that freedom is manifest not simply in practical reason but also in nature's self-organization, meaning that nature is not a threat to autonomy but that it is complicit in the enlightenment project. He responds to the charge that his critical project fails the demand of science for a system by developing a framework that aims to reconcile freedom and nature. My approach will be to examine Kant's proposal for a procedure for philosophy that, through *acknowledging* the tragedy of philosophy, does not attempt to legislate nature or action according to the concepts of the understanding but rather engages with the recalcitrant particularity of natural items of experience. This new procedure reorients

philosophy's concern with the human capacity to have the knowledge of the world to a concern with the human capacity to live well in a world that does not submit to reason's interest.¹⁵

The power of judgment

In order to accommodate the supersensible in his critical project, Kant is forced to modify the conception of judgment he outlined in *Critique of Pure Reason* so that it can operate beyond the limits of the understanding. To do this, he separates judgment into two kinds: determinant judgment, which determines an object according to a given concept; and reflective judgment, which involves the search for a concept. These distinct kinds of judgment build from the two aspects of the one account of judgment Kant developed in the first *Critique*: subsumption (*Subsumtion*) and estimation (*Beurteilung*). Subsumption is the "faculty of subsuming under rules" (*CPR* A132/B171). Yet before subsumption can undertake its determining role, estimation scans the sensory manifold in order to distinguish "whether something does or does not stand under a given rule." Estimation is thus concerned with how judgment might be used. Yet it is not canonical to judgment; in *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant holds firm to the notion that representations without objective validity are not judgments at all.

In *Critique of Judgment*, however, subsumption and estimation relate to two distinct kinds of judgment. While subsumption corresponds with what Kant calls determinant judgment, reflective judgment only partially corresponds with estimation. Unlike his account of estimation in the first *Critique*, reflective judgment does not simply distinguish whether something stands under a rule, that is, whether it can be subsumed under a concept of the understanding. Reflection is both estimative *and* judicial, despite the fact that it does not claim objective validity. Kant grants to reflective judgment a productive capacity, suggesting that it is able to operate in a way that is independent from the legislation of the understanding by *searching* for concepts; it does not determine but makes an estimation of a sensory manifold. This practice of estimation is judicial, for it involves a kind of sense making that, while not claiming objectivity, claims the agreement of its peers.

In order to identify this creative capacity of judgment to search for a concept, Kant must free the imagination from the constraints he imposed on it in the first *Critique*. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, one of Kant's basic moves is to identify two faculties of cognition (*Erkenntnisvermögen*): the

faculty of presentation and the faculty of concepts, the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) and the understanding (*Verstand*). Both faculties are at work in the relation of a knowing subject to an object: the imagination places the object before the mind, and the understanding applies conceptual schemata to the presentation.¹⁶ *Critique of Pure Reason* ultimately provides a technical conception of the imagination, for the imagination is characterized by its production of images that are determined by *a priori* principles of the understanding. It is the understanding that “first and originally makes experience possible as far as form is concerned” (*CPR* A128), ensuring that the imagination is not given over to fancy but produces knowledge. Judgment, the subsumption of objects under concepts, legislates nature according to the concepts of the understanding. The primary implication of Kant’s first *Critique* is that only when sense impressions are brought under concepts can our thinking about nature contain the subjective and objective sufficiency constitutive of knowledge.

Yet in his third *Critique*, Kant notes the importance of situations in which the substantive operation of judgment fails to find a rule under which to subsume an object, such as the failure of its causal principles to determine the dynamic nature of living beings. Indeed, we are constantly faced with objects in experience that cannot be fully understood and for which no preestablished concepts are ready at hand. Following Robert Butts, I will call these objects “recalcitrant particulars,” particular appearances that resist the governance of concepts.¹⁷ When the substantive efforts of judgment fail to determine a recalcitrant particular under a rule, understanding is embarrassed. However, as we see in the work of scientists such as Buffon, we do not conclude that such objects are without rule. Rather, we find ourselves confronted with a new task: the task of reflection. The consequence of Kant’s notion of reflection is seen in his new emphasis on the capacity of judgment to refrain from determining an object—to refrain from operating in a cognitive context—and to explore the sensory manifold in search for unity. While reflection does not involve the subsumption of an object under a concept, it does not accept that the object is entirely without law. Rather—and here Kant moves beyond the account of estimation he gave in *Critique of Pure Reason*—reflection *presumes* that appearances are amenable to law, even if no pregiven law can be found. On this presumption we seek to estimate a thing’s causal dependencies according to teleology, constructing the nexus of efficient causes productive of the object’s form as “an effect through final causes” (*CJ* 5:373).

Yet on what is this presumption based? Kant suggests that reflection presumes the lawfulness of recalcitrant particulars through a comparison (a

reflection) with other expressions of lawfulness. To reflect is “to compare and combine a given representation either with other representations or with one’s cognitive faculties, with respect to a concept thereby made possible” (*CJ* 5:179). Reflective judgments are thus estimates of objects according to an analogy with either another representation in order to find similarities and produce new concepts, or to our own purposiveness to find if they manifest the same purposiveness that we ourselves possess as rational, self-determining agents. Kant describes the operation of reflective judgment as bearing an “analogous” relation to the understanding, for it compares representations in a way that is procedurally rational while not rational in its content (*CJ* 5:180).¹⁸ The inclusion of analogical reasoning draws Kant’s work closer to Herder, who outlined a kind of reasoning by analogy that allows the rational confirmation of a relation. Yet against Herder, Kant is adamant that analogical reasoning cannot provide confirmation of its determinate content. To this extent, disagreements about matters of reflection, such as taste or the judgment of ends, are not in conflict over “the possibility of such a claim, but only . . . the correct application of his faculty to particular cases” (*CJ* 5:214). Kant insists that we can disagree over the application of the faculty of reflective judgment because it contains a transcendental principle, one that conditions the possibility of our attempts to find order amid natural diversity. But we cannot disagree over its content.

Kant’s introduction of judgment’s reflective capacity is premised on his acknowledgment of the failure of the understanding to guide judgment in contexts in which no rules can be found. By acknowledging this failure, Kant does not seek to limit the reach of judgment as a whole, but simply the reach of determinant judgment. In Kant’s work we find that the failure of determinant judgment sets the imagination on a process that reaches beyond its substantive practice with the example given by the understanding’s search for unity as its guide. While imagination was bound to the activity of the understanding in the first two *Critiques*, processing the material of sensation into the products of experience, now it is also capable of operating free of the understanding by reflecting upon the sensory manifold without determining an object.¹⁹

The distinct role Kant grants to the determinant and reflective modes of judgment bears a similar form to Aristotle’s distinction between *techné* and *phronesis*. Kant states that if “the universal (the rule, principle, or law) is given, then the judgment which subsumes the particular under it is *determining*” (*CJ* 5:179). Similarly, Aristotle suggests that *techné* considers “the kind of thing whose principles cannot be otherwise.”²⁰ For both Aristotle and Kant, the

technical operation of practical knowledge entails that a universal exists prior to the individual case and simply needs to be applied. Thus it is interested, for it is concerned with the production of an end beyond the judgment itself. The problem, however, is that no amount of applying the universal will demonstrate that the multiplicity to which it applies has any kind of unity. The technical operation of practical knowledge cannot, for example, derive any meaning from Darwin's observations of the genetic mutations in animals, for no amount of subsuming objects under categories can reach a higher principle that would demonstrate their unity. Because technical knowing is limited to the concepts it already possesses, when we are faced with recalcitrant particulars, we must use an alternative mode of thinking that is capable of navigating the parts of nature for which we have no laws at all.

This nontechnical, deliberating mode of practical knowledge does not yield the kind of knowledge that has necessity. Rather, it is able to operate in contexts where recalcitrant particulars resist the operation of technical knowledge. Aristotle's conception of *phronesis*, for example, operates where no rules can be found, for it is attuned to singular environments. Like Kant's reflective judgment, *phronesis* is an end in itself, for it does not aim for an end beyond the judgment but for the exercise of good judgment. For Kant, reflective judgment does not proceed "merely mechanically, like an instrument, but *artistically*" (CJ 20:214). He states that without it, we could "not hope to find our way in a labyrinth in the multiplicity of possible empirical laws." One of the key resonances between Kant's separation of reflective from determinant judgment and Aristotle's separation of *phronesis* from *techne* is that the failure of technical knowledge in situations for which no end can be found does not result in skepticism.²¹ Rather, it reveals that one requires an alternative kind of judgment that is appropriate to the situation at hand. Such a failure does not entail that such objects are deficient in being, but that we require a more generous procedure that allows the object to come into appearance on its own terms.

Beauty and purposiveness

In part 1 of *Critique of Judgment*, "The Critique of Aesthetic Judgment," Kant elucidates his notion of reflective judgment by focusing on judgments of taste. He gives particular focus to judgments of beauty, which provide the clearest and richest insight into the *a priori* that governs judgments of reflection. This is because judgments of beauty have the peculiar quality of

operating without the assistance of the understanding and yet, somehow, still make a universal claim to agreement. In order to locate the principle that makes this claim possible, Kant conducts the transcendental deduction of taste. He states that the solution to the “problem” of how noncognitive judgments might be universal is “the key to the critique of taste” (*CJ* 5:217), meaning that we must dwell within the problematicity of this encounter until we have understood its significance. What Kant ultimately discovers is that natural beauty leads to the formal idea of the purposiveness of nature; it is because we have *already* had an encounter with the beautiful that we are able to judge reflectively by comparing a given representation with our own purposive faculties. The critique of aesthetic judgment has the explicit intention of examining how this formal idea of purposiveness emerges.

To begin, Kant notes that the transcendental principle underpinning judgments of beauty is displayed in the rational form of such judgments. The form by which this principle is applied is radically different from determinant judgments, which are interested in their object. Instead, aesthetic judgments are disinterested in “the existence of the object of representation” (*CJ* 5:205). Taste is the faculty for judging an object “through a satisfaction or dissatisfaction,” which is to say that judgments of taste are grounded on a feeling. This feeling, however, is “*without any interest [ohne alles Interesse]*” in its object (*CJ* 5:211), for it does not seek to determine the object but to contemplate its existence. The object is a mere occasion for a noncognitive process in which “the representation is related entirely to the subject, indeed to its feeling of life [*Lebensgefühl*].” *Lebensgefühl* is a curious and evocative term, connoting the pleasurable vitality we experience in judgments of beauty. Kant seems to be drawing our attention to the fact that aesthetic judgments turn on a different economy to judgments of determinants. The representation is not related to an object, meaning that it is interested, but entirely to the subject; the subject is thus indifferent to the object’s existence. In judgments of beauty, judgment “contributes nothing to cognition.” Instead, it “only holds the given representation in the subject up to the entire faculty of representation, of which the mind becomes conscious in the feeling of its state” (*CJ* 5:204). By feeling its state in the experience of *Lebensgefühl*, one’s *mind* becomes aware of the rational form of the faculty of representation.

This awareness draws us close to the principle governing the universal claim implicit in judgments of beauty. Kant states that the structure of judgments of beauty comes from the fact that we do not judge *Lebensgefühl*—the feeling of life—to be a merely subjective pleasure, one that is simply

agreeable to the individual judge. Rather, due to the particular quality of *Lebensgefühl* we judge that it is universally communicable (*Mittheilbar*), claiming that everyone who encounters the object ought to have the same experience of pleasure, for any other feeling would express a failure to relate to the object in the right way. Kant describes this claim to universality as the “curiosity” or “strangeness” (*Merkwürdigkeit*) that is unique to aesthetic judgment, for it is not immediately clear how a nonconceptual judgment can take this universal form. On the ground of the peculiar character of the pleasure we feel, we extend the claim beyond our subjective feeling to impute the same judgment to the rest of humankind as the potential audience of that object. In other words, the feeling of *Lebensgefühl* opens us to a new *a priori*. Kant describes this aesthetic form of universality as having “a special kind, since the predicate of beauty is not connected with the concept of the object considered in its entire logical sphere, and yet it extends it over the whole sphere of those who judge [über die ganze Sphäre der Urteilenden]” (*CJ* 5:215). The basis for our claim to universality is not epistemic (connected with the concept of an object) but the feeling of pleasure unique to judgments of beauty. This pleasure opens us to the community of judges of which we are a part.

It is important to note that by appealing to the beautiful as a means to locate an *a priori*, Kant moves beyond his understanding of aesthetics in the first *Critique*. According to Paul Guyer, “in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant had completely dismissed the possibility of an *a priori* theory of taste (*CPR* A21), a position which he only barely moderated in the second edition of the work.”²² This is evident in the second edition of the “Transcendental Aesthetic,” where Kant adds a footnote about Baumgarten’s use of the word “aesthetics” to refer to a “critique of taste” (*CPR* B36). He argues that the attempt to bring judgments of beauty into philosophy is futile, for such judgments are based on empirical rules that cannot have the binding force of *a priori* rules.²³ In *Critique of Judgment*, however, the *a priori* that is proper to aesthetic experience is opened up by no other way than the pleasure we experience in the beautiful. The special intensity of this feeling of pleasure breaks from the subjective faculty of desire as Kant outlined in *Critique of Practical Reason* (*CPrR* 5:9n), where pleasure was linked to the “causality of the representation with respect to the existence of its object.” Instead, it lies entirely in its ability to animate our cognitive powers (*CJ* §9). Rather than realizing a subjective interest, the enlivenment we feel in judgments of beauty pulls us out of our regular patterns of relating to the world into something larger.

Kant seeks to establish that the animation of our cognitive powers opens us to a sense of purpose. He begins by insisting that our consideration of the beautiful does not lead us to reflect on the object itself, but on the cause of our heightened experience of life. As we come to see that this pleasure is unique among pleasures, we discover that the beautiful has “a causality in itself, namely that of maintaining the state of the representation of the mind and the occupation of the cognitive powers without a further aim” (*CJ* 5:222). While the *basis* of our universal claim lies in the feeling of *Lebensgefühl*, Kant argues that the *cause* of this encounter lies in the way that, in judging an object to be beautiful, we feel as though the natural world is congenial to our purposes and projects; we feel as though we are at home in the world. In particular, when we feel that a natural object was made for us to apprehend it, we feel that nature is, as a whole, suitable to our cognitive and practical interests.²⁴ This feeling cannot be caused by the faculty of desire obtaining its object (i.e., by cognition). If the pleasure of the given object came first, and if universal communicability were attributed to the judgment, then our claim would be contradictory. We would be making the claim that such a judgment depended on the representation of an object that is *given*. The pleasure we find in a given object can only be described as agreeable (see §7). It contains merely private validity, for we have no ground on which to extend from our subjective experience to a universal claim. The only way to conceive of the universal communicability of judgments of beauty is to see the causality the other way around: the pleasure we experience in the object must be a *consequence*, while the universal communicability of the state of mind in the given representation, as “the subjective condition of the judgment of taste, must serve as its ground” (*CJ* 5:217).

Thus Kant gives two ways of explaining the ground of aesthetic judgments: the basis of the universal nature of the claim is the communicability of the state of mind (*Gemütszustand*), while the cause of the claim is the feeling of vitality we experience (*Lebensgefühl*). He explains that the state of mind we claim to be universally communicable is encountered in the relation of the powers of representation to each other “as they relate a given representation to cognition in general” (*CJ* 5:217). The powers of representation Kant refers to are the imagination and the understanding; the imagination composes the manifold of intuition, while understanding provides the concept that unifies the representations. Rather than the determinate economy we find in cognition, where understanding unifies the manifold of intuitions provided by the imagination under a concept, judgments of taste turn on

an economy of “free play,” since “no determinate concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition” (*CJ* 5:217). In other words, the understanding contributes the notion that only universality is valid for everyone, and yet it is the imagination that gives the object without a concept. Imagination can thus act in a way that is analogous to the understanding.

The context of play is important in Kant’s account of aesthetic judgment, for it does not reconcile the unique uses of imagination and understanding but identifies their creative harmony. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant limits the synthesis of the imagination to the aims of objective cognition, which remain strictly bound to the laws of the understanding. Under law, the mode of operation of the imagination is not play but work. Reflective judgment, on the other hand, is spontaneous and productive, meaning that it is free from the laws of the understanding. Because of its freedom, it does not determine the form of an object but is able to play with possible forms. While this play is not bound to law, it does not exhibit unlimited freedom. As Kant observes, the imagination cannot be both “free” and “lawful by itself” (i.e., autonomous), for this would be contradictory (*CJ* 5:241).²⁵ The “understanding alone gives law,” meaning that, in judgments of taste, the imagination experiences “lawfulness without law [*Gesetzmäßigkeit ohne Gesetz*]” due to a “subjective correspondence . . . to the understanding without an objective one.” Rather than a relation of synthesis, the imagination and the understanding come into a relation of “harmony” (*CJ* 5:218), which results in mutual and enlivening play rather than synthesis.

It is not this free play itself (the state of mind) that provides the ground for aesthetic judgments but the feeling with the experience through the process of free play. Because the harmonization of understanding and imagination cannot appear as cognition, for there is no object to be represented, the subjective unity of the relation can only make itself known through sensation. Kant describes this sensation as the “quickenings” or “enlivening” (*Belebung*) of the faculties, for the free play of imagination and understanding makes us feel fully alive and a part of nature. In this state of mind, there is no question of how we might reconcile the theoretical and practical orders, for we are absorbed in the world as sensuous creatures. Instead, it gives us grounds to judge the object that could occasion such an experience to be beautiful and thus to claim the agreement of every rational agent.

Kant’s notion of *Belebung* leads us to his understanding of purposiveness. In the feeling of enlivenment unique to judgments of beauty, we do not only experience ourselves as organic, purposive beings. We also experience nature as a purposive whole, for we discover that it is suited to

animate our cognitive faculties. Kant concludes that “the judgment of taste has nothing but the *form of the purposiveness* [*Zweckmässigkeit*] of an object (or of the way of representing it) as its ground” (*CJ* 5:221). The ground of aesthetic judgment is ultimately the form of purposiveness, for we judge the tendency of the representation of an object to enliven our cognitive faculties as the product of a will that has arranged it so. Of course, we do not need to place this cause in a will. However, it is only possible to consider the purposive form of the cause by deriving its causality through an *analogy* with a will (*CJ* 5:220). We judge the object to be beautiful on the grounds that it appears to us *as if* it were the product of a will that intends to enliven our cognitive faculties. This ground is confirmed by the fact that we “linger” (*weilen*) over the consideration of the beautiful (*CJ* 5:222). We seek to maintain this state of representation of the mind because this consideration “strengthens and reproduces itself,” enabling us to judge nature “as if” it expressed a purpose, that is, the purpose of enlivening our cognition. Purposiveness turns out to be the *a priori* principle of judgment that governs, justifies, and makes possible reflective judgment.

Now we have traced the main thrust of Kant’s transcendental deduction of taste, it is important to understand its significance for the overall project of *Critique of Judgment*, in particular, for his critique of teleological judgment. Judgments of beauty express the form of purposiveness that releases judgment from its technical procedure so that it can operate without the understanding. When it comes to considering other aesthetic matters, such as organic life, we are not required to transgress the limits of experience by claiming objective knowledge of undetermined objects. Rather, reflective judgment is able to judge according to the form of purposiveness that allows us to compare the relations between the parts of an organism without determining its content.

The idea of the “form of purposiveness” allows Kant to unite teleological judgments and judgments of beauty under the same *a priori* and to show that both modalities of reflective judgment unite the practical and theoretical domains in the supersensible substrate. As Kant states in the second introduction, nature *must* “be able to be conceived in such a way that the lawfulness of its form is at least in agreement with the possibility of the ends that are to be realised in it in accordance with the laws of freedom” (*CJ* 5:176). This way of thinking would make “possible the transition from the manner of thinking in accordance with the principles of the one to that in accordance with the principles of the other” (*CJ* 5:175–176), thereby uniting the critical system in a speculative feeling. Purposiveness turns out

to be the key to this transition, for it binds the supersensible substrate of nature with the supersensible freedom of the moral subject, providing a solution that allows us to recognize the order (lawfulness) of nature and yet confirm our own freedom (lawlessness).²⁶

Kant describes this notion of purposiveness as “purposiveness without a purpose” (*Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck*), for the idea of purpose it gives rise to is not a determinant concept. Rather, purpose goes beyond a merely mechanistic view to an end that does not exist in nature but is necessary for cognition. Thus Kant transforms the concept of teleology that traditionally referred to a previously identified good by limiting our ability to extend it beyond our subjective experience. As Rachel Zuckert explains, the concept of purposiveness without a purpose is teleology not in the sense of “serving” an established good but of “aiming *towards* an indeterminate future end, and this new form of teleology characterizes only and specifically human, judging subjects.”²⁷ Purposiveness without a purpose does not characterize the purpose in nature or the rational intelligence of God but simply functions as a principle of human cognition, cognition that is finite and sensibly dependent.

The stunning discovery of *Critique of Judgment* is that pleasure could open us up to an *a priori*. Without giving due attention to this experience, this *a priori*—one which grounds the entire critical edifice—would remain undiscovered. Kant aims to show us that beauty illuminates us to our own nature as whole subjects, both practical and theoretical. While *Critique of Judgment* opens with the problem of how practical reason is thinkable alongside a causally determined concept of nature, it turns out that this problem poses the question inversely. While the modern subject might begin from the disintegrated experience of the amphibious animal, for we find ourselves already split apart when we begin to think reflectively, beauty draws us into the original unity of the subject that was always already a part of nature.

The antinomy of teleological judgment

Kant’s notion of reflective judgment does not draw the theoretical and practical domains into a neatly defined order under a new *a priori*, as Habermas suggests. It provides a fundamental challenge to the critical project. Determinant judgment legislates nature on *a priori* grounds, requiring appearances to adhere to a mechanistic standard in which every event has a necessary and sufficient cause. Reflective judgment, on the other hand, encompasses

a mode of judgment that operates without the technical procedure of subsuming objects under rules so that it can, on the presumption that nature is amenable to law, search for a rule. Both modes of judgment provide us with a principle with which to approach nature in our investigation of it: determinant judgment legislates all generation of material things in accordance with mechanical law; reflective judgment is attuned to the generation of material things that is not possible in accordance with mechanical law. Because both forms of judgment are “rationalizing” [*vernünftelnd sein*], that is, because both claim universality on *a priori* grounds (CJ 5:377), they form two equally necessarily but apparently contradictory propositions, each of which makes a valid claim on us.

Kant presents this conflict as the antinomy of teleological judgment. This antinomy arises between the two conceptions of nature presumed by determinant and reflective judgment: the concept of nature as mechanism and the concept of nature as purposive. Both of these concepts provide a principled way to approach nature, and yet if *both* principles are to guide the inquiry into nature, then the scientific enterprise appears to be without a systematic basis. In response to this puzzle, some commentators such as John McFarland suggest that the antinomy of teleological judgment is not a true antinomy between concepts of the understanding but simply a conflict of two reflective principles.²⁸ This line of argument presents Kant’s new account of teleological judgment as a concession to the developing field of the life sciences that does not make any real alteration to his project. It suggests that Kant’s goal is to limit the inquiry of the life sciences to a *regulative* procedure, while maintaining the *constitutive* nature of the speculative sciences. In this framework, the life sciences are deemed to be the lesser sciences, for they cannot yield necessity, while the speculative sciences retain the scientific ideal of demonstrative knowledge understood as *Wissen*.

McFarland’s thesis entails that Kant does not provide a response to the tragedy of philosophy, understood as the inevitable failure of the understanding to legislate the whole of nature. Instead, he aims to secure his earlier account of judgment by restricting reflective judgment to a merely regulative function. In contrast to McFarland, I aim to show that while Kant refuses to let go of the scientific ideal of demonstrative knowledge, his speculative consideration of objective purposiveness in §§72–78 entails that the antinomy is not so easily solved. I will argue that Kant presents a genuinely new and demanding antinomy, indeed, one that is in one sense *more* demanding than the antinomies of the first two *Critiques*. Rather than solving the antinomy by demoting the constitutive principles of nature to

merely regulative principles, or deeming one maxim to be phenomenal and the other noumenal as he did in the earlier *Critiques*, Kant aims to solve the antinomy by finding a positive ground to the critical system. In other words, he aims to solve the antinomy by reconciling the two maxims in a quasi-speculative manner. This solution almost certainly provides a modification to some of the arguments Kant outlined in *Critique of Pure Reason*.

To understand the antinomy, it is important to note how far the idea of purposiveness stands from the concept of nature Kant puts forward in his earlier work. In his pre-critical "Essay on the Constitution and the Mechanical Origin of the Whole Universe according to Newtonian Principles" (1755), Kant explores mechanical necessity and beauty in the same framework: "Matter, which is the original material of all things, is thus bound by certain laws, and if it is left freely to these laws, it must necessarily bring forth beautiful combinations."²⁹ In this determination of nature there can be neither self-organization nor contingency, and beauty is understood as the necessarily unfolding of the mathematical order. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant recognizes that this determinant formulation forced nature to adhere to the strictures of a subjective concept. Instead of exploring nature "in itself," he defines nature as the "sum of appearances in so far as they stand, in virtue of an inner principle of causality, in thoroughgoing interconnection" (*CPR* B446). This concept of nature accepts only what appears in the paradigm of technical judgment, meaning that only what is constituted can be known. That which stands outside of our ability to determine does not feature as a matter of epistemic importance. Kant separates nature as a thing in itself from our concept of nature, stressing the formal organization of cognition in thoroughgoing interconnection.

Kant's understanding of nature develops significantly in *Critique of Judgment*. The form of purposiveness revealed through the transcendental deduction of taste pushes thought beyond the concept of nature as the sum of appearances toward an experience of nature as a purposive domain. This conception of nature cannot be a schema, allowing the application of concepts in order to produce knowledge. Rather, it appears to us in the form of a "symbol," that is, something that beckons language but that cannot be articulated, something that forever exceeds the power of the concept (see §59). Unlike a schema, a symbol allows for the indirect presentation of an undetermined idea. Thus the antinomy lies between the two ways that nature appears to us: as mechanism and as purposive, as concept and as symbol. The first takes the form of the thesis that "all generation of material things and their forms must be judged as possible in accordance

with merely mechanical laws" (*CJ* 5:387). The second takes the form of the antithesis that "some products of material nature cannot be judged as possible according to merely mechanical laws."³⁰

In his efforts to identify the continuity of Kant's argument in *Critique of Judgment* with the concept of nature developed in *Critique of Pure Reason*, McFarland argues that this antinomy of teleological judgment contains no real antinomy. He draws our attention to the difference between the form of the antinomy of teleological judgment and the form of the antinomies presented in the first *Critique*. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, the antinomies entail a contradiction between two concepts in a context that reason "demands an absolute totality."³¹ Taking this definition, McFarland argues that there cannot be an antinomy of teleological judgment, for judgment is teleological only if it works without concepts.³² Thus there is no real problem raised by the so-called antinomy if the principles are taken to be regulative rather than constitutive.

McFarland draws from the puzzling way that Kant, having stated the antinomy in the form of determinative judgment, observes that the antinomy does not lie in nature but in the way we judge nature. Kant states, "All appearance [*Anschein*] of an antinomy between [the mechanistic and teleological principles] rests on confusing a fundamental principle of the reflecting with that of the determining power of judgment" (*CJ* 5:389). For McFarland, Kant's ultimate intention in recognizing the contradiction between the concepts of mechanism and teleology is to show that "the mechanical system is regulative as a methodological principle, and that when occasion arises we may use teleological concepts without contradiction."³³ Essentially, McFarland interprets Kant's project in the third *Critique* as a task of *overcoming* the so-called embarrassment of the understanding by maintaining the determinative concept of nature as mechanism while granting a limited scope for making reflective judgments of purpose. Nature remains subject to inner laws that cannot be known, and we fall into contradiction only when we attempt to judge purpose determinatively.

However, McFarland fails to note that Kant's formulation of the antinomy does not meet the critical conditions of the first *Critique* that require us to think of one in terms of noumena and the other in terms of phenomena. Rather, in the "preparation" for the resolution of the antinomy in §71 and in the discussion of the dialectic in §§72–78, Kant formulates the antinomy in a quasi-speculative manner, urging us to think the unity of reason with reference to the supersensible substrate. This unity is, of course, limited to thought, for Kant maintains the separation of thinking (*Denken*)

from both knowing (*Wissen*) and cognition (*Erkenntnis*) that he outlined in *Critique of Pure Reason*. There he stated that while cognizing an object requires that I am able “to prove its possibility,” I can “think whatever I like, as long as I do not contradict myself” (*CPR* Bxx vi). Kant’s solution to the antinomy of *Critique of Judgment*, however, does not employ the faculty of thinking in order to return to the theme of the thinkability of the noumenal sphere. Rather, the notion of thinking allows Kant to respond to the speculative demand of reason for unity. If the faculty of feeling allows us to think the unity of nature in the supersensible, the mechanistic and teleological concepts of nature cannot be conceptualized differentially, as can the phenomenal and noumenal spheres of the first *Critique*. The deeper set of ontological commitments contained in the principle of teleology cannot be kept distinct from the mechanical concept of nature. By dissolving the antinomy, McFarland ignores the fascinating and obscure discussion of the intellectual intuition in §§71–78, thus failing to recognize the deeper challenge that the reflective notion of purposiveness poses to Kant’s earlier understanding of the critical system.

To suggest that Kant merely demotes the contradictory principles from constitutive principles of determinative judgment to regulative principles of reflective judgment is, as Henry Allison aptly states, “ultimately untenable.”³⁴ For Allison, the former, determinative formulation of the antinomy is the one that demands our attention, for while it is not an antinomy like those we find in *Critique of Pure Reason*, it provides a “threat of an even greater contradiction.”³⁵ This greater contradiction lies in the ontological commitments associated with both mechanical and teleological thinking, for if we are required to think of nature as both mechanical and teleological, then, as Werner Pluhar states, we are effectively required to judge “as both necessary and contingent ‘one and the same product’ (*CJ* 5:413), indeed, even the same causal *connections* within that product (*CJ* 5:373, and cf. 372–73).”³⁶ Thus we are “*contradicting ourselves (CJ 5:396) unless we can reconcile the two principles (CJ 5:414).*” The antinomy is not solved by separating mechanism and teleology into the noumenal and phenomenal spheres. Rather, it pushes us to reconcile both domains in some other way.

Allison and Pluhar suggest that Kant’s solution does not lie in dissolving the antinomy in the reflective formulation of both laws, which would simply ignore the problem and settle for judgment to operate in two separate spheres, but in a kind of thinking that reconciles the two in some third principle. Gary Banham suggests that reading the antinomy in this manner reveals that the “need for this third principle is what the Dialectic

as a whole is written both to demonstrate and to provide.”³⁷ While the antinomies of the first *Critique* aimed to show that it is necessary to keep the practical and theoretical spheres distinct, the antinomy of teleological judgment leads us to search for a “ground outside ourselves” (CJ 5:246) that reconciles the two. This ground cannot be theoretically objective, that is, it cannot be known; that would require an infinite intellect (*intellectus archetypes*) that is not bound by the discursive constraints of human cognition that produces images (*intellectus ectypus*). However, neither can it be only practically necessary, like the negative, grounding noumena in *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant makes it clear that while he is reluctant to identify a positive ground to the system, such a ground is “forced” (*genötigt*) upon us by the antinomy. Through encountering this antinomy, Kant concedes that “one is compelled, against one’s will [*wider Willen nötigen*], to look beyond the sensible and to seek the unifying point of all our faculties *a priori* in the supersensible: because no other way remains to make reason self-consistent” (CJ 5:341).

While Kant unwillingly moves beyond the critical philosophy of the first *Critique*, he does not embark on a fully blown speculative project that returns content to metaphysics. In the feeling of pleasure we experience in judgments of beauty, the contradictory maxims of the antinomy are unified in what Kant calls a mutual and yet unknown way:

On account of the outer possibility of a nature that corresponds to it, as related to something in the subject itself and outside of it, which is neither nature nor freedom, but which is connected with the ground of the latter, namely the supersensible, in which the theoretical faculty is combined with the practical, in a mutual and unknown way [*auf gemeinschaftliche und unbekannte Art*], to form a unity. (CJ 5:353)

The antinomy of the theoretical and the practical spheres pushes us beyond the failure of a philosophical system that grants to determinant judgment an unlimited jurisdiction over nature to a deeper feeling we undergo when judgment fails and nature’s generosity overwhelms us. The antinomy cannot be resolved “for us” or “in a known way,” as it was in *Critique of Pure Reason*. Instead, Kant is forced to recognize that while the resolution cannot be known, it can be felt in judgments of reflection. And if the resolution can be felt, then it can be thought, not in a theoretical kind of thinking that produces knowledge but in a poetic kind of thinking that is capable

of operating symbolically.³⁸ The hope of reconciling the antinomy in poetic thought is the very hope of *Critique of Judgment*, for it provides a way in which we can think of morality and nature in a consistent manner. Thus it cannot be said, following Habermas, that Kant unifies epistemology, moral culture, and aesthetic culture as three separate domains, each containing its own *a priori*. While the first two *Critiques* put forward constitutive principles that govern nature and morality, the third *Critique* does not. Instead, philosophical speculation takes a step back, enabling Kant to identify a principle in embodied experience that unifies the other two. Kant's claim is that there is no other way to make reason self-consistent.

Kant's solution to the antinomy of teleological judgment demands a concept of nature that is larger than one that takes the form of an already constituted region of causality. This concept of nature does not stand in an antinomial relationship with freedom but in genuine union. In order to reconcile the antinomy in the supersensible substrate, Kant recognizes that we must first acknowledge that nature is beyond our concept of it, not by virtue of being a thing in itself but by virtue of being resistant to totalizing concepts. When any conceptual item, such as nature, extends our thought beyond the limits of possible experience, theoretical knowledge—a direct, schematic presentation—becomes impossible, and we are forced to use a more expansive mode of thinking that is capable of acknowledging the underdetermined character of items of experience. Kant expresses this indirect relation through the language of the symbol (see §59). Symbolic presentation makes possible a concept “which only reason can think, and to which no sensible intuition can be adequate” (*CJ* 5:351). In such a presentation “judgment proceeds in a way merely analogous to that which it observes in schematization.” When we move from a schematic to a symbolic presentation of nature, Kant notes that we expand “our concept of nature, namely as a mere mechanism, into the concept of nature as art” (*CJ* 5:246). Expanding our concept of nature from mechanism to art entails a presentation of nature, as Allison states, that is “far broader than reason's concept of systematicity” we find in the first *Critique*.³⁹ Such a presentation is symbolic to the extent that it remains larger than our knowledge of it. To use Dennis Schmidt's apt words, it entails “a sense of nature so generous that it shatters the economy of the concept.”⁴⁰

Elsewhere, Kant elucidates this enlarged presentation of nature by describing natural beauty as “an analogue of art” (*CJ* 5:375). The analogy between natural beauty and art allows us to think of beauty as nature's self-expression in the same way that we understand the beauty in art to be an

expression of the artwork. Thus understood, beauty is ascribed to objects “only in relation to reflection on their outer intuition” and not according to a rational artist or an efficient principle. While the outer surface of nature can be understood to be analogous to our intentional experience, because it deals with appearances (i.e., in terms of the *form* of purposiveness and not purposiveness in itself),

inner natural perfection, as is possessed by those things that are possible only as natural ends and hence as organized beings, is not thinkable and explicable in accordance with any analogy to any . . . natural capacity that is known to us; indeed, since we ourselves belong to nature in the widest sense, it is not thinkable and explicable even through an exact analogy with human art. (*CJ* 5:375)

Kant makes the remarkable observation that analogy can help us to think of beauty as nature’s self-expression because *human beings belong to nature*. He concludes that if human beings belong to nature, then nature must be reimagined as “an analogue of life” (*CJ* 5:375), that is, as a self-forming whole that contains a will, that is free.

From system to method

The enlarged concept of nature “forced” upon us by the antinomy of teleological judgment provides a regulative principle to guide the investigation of nature as a research program rather than a finished system. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, determinant judgment legislates nature according to its concept of systematicity. In *Critique of Judgment*, however, reflective judgment allows one to judge nature as a self-organizing entity, meaning that it remains always beyond the understanding. In Kant’s terms, reflective judgment does not prescribe law “to nature (which would be autonomy), but to itself (which is heautonomy) for reflection on nature” (*CJ* 5:185-6). Heautonomy is a principle of reflective judgment that is not “cognized *a priori*” but is “the law of the specification of nature” (*CJ* 5:186). It is a principle used by judgment in order to facilitate the investigation of nature, to find “the universal for the particular presented to it by perception.” In this regard, what Kant ultimately achieves in *Critique of Judgment* is a shift in emphasis away from outlining a completed system to a focus on methodology. This

shift turns on Kant's realization of the need for an alternative to the self-interested nature of truth-only cognition.

Kant presents the capacity of judgment to operate reflectively as a way of thinking that is learned according to the example given to it by the autonomous use of judgment that gives law to nature (determinant judgment), which constantly and spontaneously unites manifolds under concepts.⁴¹ Determinant judgment is interested to the extent that it contains "a principle that contains the condition under which alone the power's exercise is furthered" (*CPrR* 5:119). This principle is given by reason, which is the superior "power of principles." Kant goes to great lengths to show that our interests are given to us by rational principles, for he seeks to show that cognition does not follow the laws of nature but the laws given by reason.⁴²

Following reason's instruction, determinant judgment is interested in synthesizing sensible material with concepts. When judgment comes into a *noncognitive* relation to an object—when its occupation is contemplative rather than epistemological—it discovers its own freedom from law by operating in a domain that is distinct from the epistemic domain of determinant judgment. In this domain, judgment is without interest, for it is no longer concerned for the acquisition of knowledge but with enjoying the presence of the object. In the frame of contemplation, recalcitrant particulars such as works of art and living beings are not so much understood as they are appreciated. In this sense judgments of reflection are not autonomous in Kant's meaning of the term, for they do not give rule to nature. Rather, they are heteronomous, for they involve a procedure whereby judgment governs itself, leaving the object of contemplation underdetermined.

While Kant retains the scientific ideal of demonstrative knowledge, his recognition of a noninterested space that opens up in our reflective consideration of nature calls into question the priority he grants to determinant over reflective judgment when it comes to truth. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant made it clear that it is the determinant use of judgment that "first and originally makes experience possible as far as its form is concerned" (*CPR* A128). The application of a determinate concept is not causally determined by the object, for it is the result of judgment scanning (estimating) a sensory manifold in order to arrange a match between the manifold and a concept. Thus a judgment is determinant not in contexts where no searching is necessary but in contexts where the discerning work is done under the governance of a legislating faculty (i.e., the understanding). To accommodate the lawfulness of appearances that do not adhere to the concepts of the understanding, Kant's reflective conception of judgment is able to search for

unity through a procedure that it has “observed” in schematization (see *CJ* 5:351). This procedure is analogous to the understanding to the extent that it searches for unity in aesthetic diversity. However, because the reflective use of judgment operates without this legislating faculty in a sphere in which objects appear without determination, it can hardly be a way of thinking that is *observed* from the example given to it by determinant judgment.

Kant’s remarkable discovery in *Critique of Judgment*—a discovery that perhaps goes beyond his explicit intentions—is made possible by his reflective method. Kant does not simply acknowledge the failure of the understanding to grasp nature as a whole but also allows this acknowledgment to transform his understanding of what nature is. This method provides an implicit response to the tragedy of philosophy, understood as the inevitable failure of an exclusively technical approach to judgment to grasp the whole of nature. Kant recognizes that if we remain committed to a determinant concept of nature as mechanism, then our systematic ambitions are destined to fail from the outset. If we acknowledge the generosity of nature that exceeds the subsumptive capacities of the understanding, however, nature is able to appear at the very moment we are torn from our subjective interest. Despite Kant’s intentions to systematize reflective judgment as a derivative of the primary judicial form, the disinterest of reflective judgment works *against* the interest of the understanding. The disinterest suggests that reflective judgment is not derivative from but rather the operation of judgment freed from its technical application. If this is the case, then the capacity for bringing contingent manifolds into unity without concepts is not an addition to the capacity for determinative judgment; it is presupposed by it. Kant’s transcendental method aims to discover within subjectivity forms that are more than subjective. While this method discovers that the understanding is interested, this interest lies outside those particular to subjectivity, such as inclination. The disinterestedness of reflective judgment, however, involves the self-limitation or bracketing of subjectivity for the sake of the object judged.⁴³ From the vantage of aesthetic disinterest, which we seek to preserve due to its harmony with life itself, it seems that the understanding and the priority it bestows on truth-only cognition is not simply interested to the extent that it follows a principle of reason; it also contains a trace of *subjective* interest, privileging the production of knowledge as an end that is beyond the object over a more basic receptivity to nature. Kant’s great discovery in the first *Critique* is that humans, like all living things, are interested, embodied agents who are constantly determining the world according to preestablished needs. Kant’s great discovery in the third *Critique* is that we

become aware of a subjective dimension to this interest at the moment that the generosity of nature overwhelms us, as determinate judgment fails before the excessive presence of a natural sphere that is indifferent to our desires.

Kant's discovery has enormous implications for philosophical inquiry. In particular, it demonstrates that nature can no longer provide an objective condition for the agreement of knowledge. Indeed, our reflective judgments of nature make no knowledge claims at all. In judgments of reflection agreement cannot be guaranteed by demonstration. Rather, agreement becomes the aspiration of a community united around a mode of collective judging that does not use reason to give law to nature but rather to itself. In the following chapter I suggest that Kant's approach in *Critique of Judgment* ultimately transforms the task of critical philosophy from limiting the use of reason to the strictures of objective knowledge into a collective task of making sense in common.

The Ethical Turn

. . . with this I bring my entire critical enterprise to an end.

—Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*

In his “Ode to Newton,” Halley cast Newton as a “genius” capable of leading humanity to “scale the heights of heaven.” In *Critique of Judgment*, Kant denies Newton that lofty status of genius. He concedes that Newton is indeed a “great mind,” who “thinks for himself,” “does not merely take up what others have thought,” and even “invents a great deal for . . . science” (*CJ* 5:308). Yet Newton’s work “still lies on the natural path of inquiry and reflection in accordance with rules” and thus does not warrant the status of genius. Kant agrees with Halley on one point, for he reserves the category of genius for the capacity to elevate humanity to matters beyond the order of given sensation. Unlike Halley, he considers Newton’s insight into the laws of nature a work of “imitation” that “could also have been learned” by anyone who followed Newton’s method. In other words, Newton can tell us nothing of the inimitable realm: the realm of freedom. Kant reserves the title of genius for those endowed with the capacity to give expression to freedom *within* the material order, thereby communicating the viability of freedom in nature. Rather than outlining demonstrable knowledge, the genius “promotes the cultivation of the mental powers for sociable communication” (*CJ* 5:306), opening a collective project of realizing human ends within the natural sphere.

Kant’s concept of genius evinces a significant transition in his work. In the letter he wrote to Reinhold in December 1787, Kant stated that his critique of taste was intended to complete the critical system by uniting the theoretical and the practical spheres beneath the aegis of a new *a priori*. However, by the 1789 drafts of the third *Critique*—the drafts in which he

develops the notion of genius—Kant had expanded his project from the subjective task of reconciling morality and nature as the two spheres of philosophy to a matter of collective and interpersonal concern. It appears that Kant came to see that the systematic demands of reason could not be achieved through philosophy, and thus he began to consider philosophy as part of a historical project in which human creativity expresses the shared ground of freedom and nature in lived experience. John Zammito argues that this development, seen most clearly in Kant's inclusion of genius, *sensus communis*, and the sublime in the final drafts of *Critique of Judgment*, springs from a new understanding of history as a sphere that is “not spontaneously moral but could be changed by human praxis.”¹ Zammito's appeal to the notion of *praxis* is important, for it suggests that Kant expands his account of practical reason from its former purview of rationalizing sensuous impulses to more broadly encompass the creative use of reason in contexts for which no preestablished rules are available. The creative dimensions of human action become increasingly central to Kant's attempt to reconcile the critical project, signaling what Zammito describes as an “ethical turn” in his work, that is, an attempt to ground his transcendental analysis of taste in the cultural and historical mores of a community.²

Zammito identifies two important events in Europe occurring in the late-1780s that stimulated this ethical turn. The first is the debate then unfolding in philosophy and the sciences concerning the idea of an immanent purpose in nature: hylozoism or pantheism, especially in the form that Herder sought to propagate among German intellectuals. Kant understood pantheism to be a new and dangerous form of dogmatic metaphysics, for it entails a claim to knowledge in regard to both nature and God. His notion of the supersensible, the underlying principle of the critical system that can be felt and thought but not known, provides his own particular response to the Pantheism Controversy. The second stimulus to Kant's ethical turn concerns the early stages of the Revolution occurring in France. The demand for a new political order made by French radicals seems to have led Kant to see that his first two *Critiques* failed to provide a way of reconciling reason and nature that could open a new epoch of enlightenment. This dilemma does not simply concern reason and nature as parts of the critical system; in the context of growing instability throughout Europe, it also concerns the role of philosophy in leading humanity toward its moral vocation in history.³

Kant's response to the failure of his critical philosophy to reconcile reason and nature adds a further layer to my argument in this book, for

it provides an additional response to the problem that later philosophers conceptualize in terms of tragedy. In the previous chapter I suggested that Kant's notion of reflective judgment turned on his acknowledgment of the failure of philosophical systems that grant determinant judgment unlimited jurisdiction in regard to nature. In this chapter I suggest that Kant provides a similar move in terms of his account of practical philosophy: his understanding of history as a domain of human *praxis* turns on his acknowledgment of the failure of philosophical systems that grant practical judgment unlimited jurisdiction in regard to morality. This is important to note, for the notion of tragedy we find in the Idealist program responds to both of these problems.

Here I aim to outline Kant's response to the second problem, which I touched on briefly in the previous chapter. In the first two *Critiques*, Kant advances the critical project by appealing to humans as *moral* creatures. He claims that our moral aspirations—our need to know whether morality is in fact a viable project—can only be reconciled in a “higher reason” necessitated by our moral sensibility and yet which lies outside the realm of knowledge (*CPR* A810/B838). The higher reason provides a guarantee that moral action will, in the end, yield good results. Yet in the final drafts of his third *Critique*, Kant ceases to accept this settlement. In the context of the increasing popularity of pantheism and the tumultuous years of the French Revolution, he came to see that his exclusive appeal to humans as moral creatures was unable to confirm the viability of the moral project. In response, he appeals to humans as *sensuous* creatures in the attempt to provide a way of thinking *this* world as a place hospitable to the moral calling.

To identify a new procedure for thinking capable of this task, Kant grounds critical philosophy as a historical project, one that requires neither a revolution nor a conservative revision but that is already in motion. This move, I suggest, implicitly responds to the tragedy of philosophy: it transforms the task of philosophy from one of legislating the practical domain according to reason (i.e., from a technical task) to one of outlining a procedure through which society might develop toward a kingdom of ends (i.e., to a political task). While Zammito suggests that this move was “stimulated no doubt by the French Revolution,”⁴ I will suggest that, in light of the Revolution, it was also stimulated by a reassessment of Rousseau's revolutionary project. In *On the Social Contract*, Rousseau refuses to provide the substantive content of laws that would constitute a just and equal society. He rather outlines a procedure by which a people might realize just laws by altering their mores (at the direction of the legislator) as

they give themselves law. Understanding *Critique of Judgment* in terms of a new philosophical procedure entails that Kant's response to the failure of philosophy to reconcile morality and nature is to undermine the hegemony that philosophy had traditionally held over the creative sphere of society. Effectively, Kant removes philosophy from its abstract position as the legislator of practical life and relocates it as an institution within history with the task of empowering the polity to take up its practical calling. This move begins to shift human dependency to a position that is prior to human freedom, placing Kant much closer to Herder, Schelling, Hölderlin, and Hegel than is often recognized.

Reason's double bind

By presenting the separation of the theoretical and practical spheres in *Critique of Judgment* as a problem that demands further philosophical work, it is clear that Kant's thinking has developed since the first and second *Critiques*. Let us begin by laying out the problem as it stands before *Critique of Judgment*. Kant makes it clear from the start of *Critique of Pure Reason* (Bix-x) that reason takes two forms based on the fact that cognition relates to its object in two distinct ways: by determining a concept through an object (theoretical reason) and by willing the existence of an object (practical reason). Theoretical reason requires that we consider the world as a law-governed system, where every event has a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for its existence. Practical reason, on the other hand, requires that we presuppose a world of freedom in which it is possible for the subject to derive and follow his or her own laws. While these two ways of conceiving the world seem contradictory, Kant famously argues that we must take each on its own terms.

While *Critique of Pure Reason* is dedicated to staking out the limits of reason in such a way that justifies the bipartisan character of philosophy, in the second part, the Transcendental Doctrine of Method, Kant acknowledges that reason contains a speculative need to find peace "in the completion of its circle in a self-subsisting systematic whole" (A798/B826). For most of the *Critique*, Kant sought to show that pure reason cannot achieve this speculative interest, and that philosophy must be rethought not as the process of "discovering truth" but as "the determination of boundaries" (*CPR* A796/B824). Once these boundaries have been established, the highest objects of philosophy, namely, the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul,

and the existence of God, cannot be attained by speculation (*CPR* A798/B826). Nor do we need them, for the answers to these questions are not necessary for the purposes of knowing. Yet if the answers are not necessary for knowing, Kant then considers why reason endlessly strives toward them. He concludes that “if these three cardinal propositions are not at all necessary for our knowing, and yet are insistently recommended to us by our reason, their importance must really concern only the practical” (*CPR* A799/B827).

By identifying the proper domain of the speculative questions of reason in terms of the practical, Kant establishes that while speculative philosophy is unable to satisfy the questions it raises for itself, another experiment lies open to us that might lead to the satisfaction of reason. This experiment considers whether reason’s *practical* interest might be able to “guarantee that which in regard to its speculative interest it entirely refuses to us” (*CPR* A804/B832). In order to undertake this experiment, Kant identifies that the entire interest of reason is united in the three questions, “What can I know?,” “What should I do?,” and “What may I hope?” (*CPR* A805/B833). The first question is theoretical and is answered by Kant’s analysis of cognition. The second is practical and belongs to Kant’s analysis of reason. The third question, however, is “simultaneously practical and theoretical” and thus lies at the heart of reason’s speculative concern (*CPR* A805/B833). Because the practical and theoretical arise simultaneously in the question of hope, and because the practical gives us “pure” access to reason, Kant concludes that “the practical leads like a clue to a reply to the theoretical question, and, in its highest form, the speculative question.” Thus our hope provides the clue to the completion of the critical system, for it throws us onto practical reason as the ground of the critical project.

Applying this clue to the speculative interest of reason for a unified enterprise, Kant aims to answer the question “What can I hope?” by prioritizing practical over theoretical reason. Of course, we cannot answer the question by viewing the dictates of practical reason *as* theoretical reason. Theoretical reason operates on the principle that “something is . . . *because something does happen*.” Thus if we view practical reason as constitutive in the same way that we must think of theoretical reason, then to think the moral principles of reason would be to produce them as laws of nature. This, for Kant, is impossible, for the constitutive power of reason is limited to God’s cognition. If, on the other hand, we understand the practical use of reason as regulative, and thus separate from the theoretical use of reason, we discover that it contains several principles of the possibility of experience

that are unavailable to theoretical reason, in particular, “the inference that something *is . . . because something ought to happen.*” This inference aims to draw the practical and theoretical together, for it shows that if practical reason shows us that something ought to happen, then it must be able to happen. Moreover, it reveals that practical reason makes possible a special kind of systematic unity—a *possible* unity—even if it does not satisfy the kind of proof that theoretical reason usually seeks.

Kant takes the notion of possible unity to answer the third question: If I behave in such a way as to be worthy of happiness, *how may I hope thereby to partake of it?* (*CPR* A809/B837). Underpinning this question is the desire to know whether the principles of practical reason—in particular, the idea of the moral world—are *necessarily* connected with our hope for happiness. In other words, we desire to know whether we can be guaranteed that our moral action will result in happiness. Thus morality is intrinsically connected with happiness, yet only in an ideal sense:

. . . just as the moral principles are necessarily in accordance with reason in its practical use, it is equally necessary to assume in accordance with reason in its theoretical use that everyone has cause to hope for happiness in the same measure as he has made himself worthy of it in his conduct, and that the system of morality is therefore inseparably combined with the system of happiness, though only in the idea of pure reason. (*CPR* A809/B837)

Kant seems to be saying the following. If we ground the connection between the hope of happiness and the sensible existence of the moral world, then the connection between the two cannot be one of necessity. Such a system of self-rewarding morality, Kant observes, “is only an idea, the realization of which rests on the condition that everyone do what he should” (*CPR* A810/B839). How, then, can we hope to be happy if we act justly in an unjust world? At this moment it seems that reason’s speculative need for systematicity leads the critical project to a double bind: the actualization of the moral good depends on the existence of the kingdom of ends, and yet the existence of the kingdom of ends depends on moral agents actualizing the moral good.

Kant’s response is to return to the limits of theoretical reason, and the prior demand of the practical. He states that we cannot think that the consequences of our just actions will result in happiness because of “the nature of things in the world,” or by “the causality of actions themselves.”

In other words, the necessary connection between the hope of being happy and our moral effort “cannot be cognized through reason.” Rather, it may be hoped for only if we consider reason to be “grounded on a highest reason, which commands in accordance with moral laws, as at the same time the cause of nature.” Kant concludes, “God and a future life are two presuppositions that are not to be separated from the obligation that pure reason imposes on us” (*CPR* A811/B839).

In *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant is more explicit in regard to the priority of practical over theoretical reason. His goal is to ground the interest of theoretical reason on what he terms the “primacy” of practical reason’s interests over the interests of theoretical reason. Kant defines primacy as “the preeminence of the interest of one thing insofar as to this [interest] (which cannot be put second to any others) the interest of the others is subordinated” (*CPrR* 5:119). Because theoretical reason is limited to the faculties of sensibility and understanding, we fall into error if we think that it can provide speculative truths independently from the sensible world. Thus it can tell us nothing of ultimate ends nor establish the unity of the theoretical and practical spheres. Practical reason, on the other hand, is separated from our “pathological conditions,” that is, our inclinations (*CPrR* 5:120). It is not limited to experience and is able to embody the fullness of reason’s pure interest.

Kant concludes that we can only meet the speculative need of reason to unify the theoretical and practical spheres by subordinating the interests of theoretical reason to those of practical reason. Thus “as soon as these same propositions [such as freedom, the existence of God, and the future] belong *inseparably to the practical interest* of pure reason, it [theoretical reason] must assume them” (*CPrR* 5:121). Despite the fact that the propositions are borrowed from practical reason, theoretical reason must accept that they are “sufficiently authenticated” and “seek to compare and connect them with everything that it has in its power as speculative reason.” This can occur without violating its own interest, which exists in restricting “speculative outrage.” Here Kant goes beyond the claim that we can presuppose God and the afterlife that he made in *Critique of Pure Reason*; he calls a proposition borrowed from practical reason a “postulate,” which he describes as “a *theoretical* proposition, though one not provable as such, insofar as it attaches inseparably to a practical law that holds *a priori* [and] unconditionally” (*CPrR* 5:122). Thus theoretical reason may accept the postulates of God, freedom, and immortality as “a foreign offering not grown on its own soil” (*CPrR* 5:120) without violating the limits it sets for speculative reason.

Kant's solution to the double bind in the first two *Critiques* is practical, but not political, for the kingdom of ends forever remains a future hope required by practical reason. After *Critique of Practical Reason*, however, it seems that Kant became aware of the asymptotic relation between the "is" and the "ought," possibly due to the fact that his solution failed to convince his critics.⁵ The problem with the solution provided in the first two *Critiques*—a problem that he now deems to require further philosophical work—is that it does not transform the way we think of *this* world.⁶ If our empirical concerns give us cause to doubt the moral postulates, then reason—the very power that ought to ground the moral project—leads the moral agent to either despair at the state of the moral project or to acts of revolutionary zeal in the attempt to force an ideal set of values onto history. For Kant, neither despair nor revolution do justice to the competing demands of the double bind, for both simply impose one side of the bind onto the other.

The dilemma bears a close resemblance to that noted by Rousseau in *On the Social Contract*. After outlining the only legitimate form of government as that by which a society gives law to itself, Rousseau notes a problem facing this project. On one hand, just laws cannot be given to unjust people, for the people will not follow them. On the other hand, the people cannot become just without just laws, for they will simply remain as they are. Thus understood, the matter of establishing a just society stands in a bind that is not dissimilar to that noted by Kant, for it involves two extremes that stand in opposition: the unjust mores of the people (*les mœurs injustes*) and just laws (*les lois justes*). Rousseau notes that if a people is to become free, that is, united under a just government or social contract, they must find a way of overcoming this bind.

Here Rousseau's infamous legislator comes into play. The legislator, Rousseau states, "must feel himself capable of changing, so to speak, human nature."⁷ The legislator must possess this remarkable power, for if the unjust people are to overcome the double bind, then they must be "strengthened" and given a "moral existence" in order to complement the physical existence they have received from nature. In other words, the legislator must give each member of the polity "forces that are alien to him and that he cannot make use of without the help of others." Yet the legislator is not to give these forces by coercion. Indeed, he should have "no legislative right," for in such a case he would merely "perpetuate his injustices."⁸ Rather, the legislator should simply "frame" the laws, using his particular "genius" to orient the people toward the instituting of good laws: since "the legislator

is incapable of using either force or reasoning, he must of necessity have recourse to an authority of a different order, which can compel without violence and persuade without convincing.” Genius is the exercise of authority that comes from a noncoercive order, enabling the legislator to educate the people in such a way that reorients them from their unjust mores toward their “moral existence.” In other words, the legislator must empower the people to see beyond the given in order to will the good. Yet because the people cannot *yet* recognize the good, the legislator must not advocate the final, good laws immediately. Rather, he must outline laws that are amenable to the mores of the people, for “there is a time of maturity that must be awaited before subjecting them to the laws.”⁹ The legislator dissolves the double bind by providing laws that allow the people to will the good, thereby altering their mores.

For Kant, Rousseau’s greatest and most distinctive achievement lies in his separation of mores from morality.¹⁰ This separation is grounded on Rousseau’s account of the state of nature. According to Rousseau, the state of nature posits a vision of humanity free from the mores of collective life, thereby providing a way to consider the potential of humanity beyond what the empirical sciences could envisage. While Kant himself was uninterested in providing a theory of the state of nature, he acknowledges that Rousseau “did not really want the human being to *go* back to the state of nature, but rather to *look* back at it from the stage where he now stands” (*APV* 232). The state of nature thus provides a way of identifying the dignity of humankind in a higher freedom than is expressed by the current mores of humanity, revealing the plasticity of those mores and providing an aspiration to something beyond the given.

Rousseau’s account of the legislator draws our attention to the political ground of the moral project. In his *Confessions* he argues that everything is “radically connected with politics, and that, upon whatever principles these were founded, a people would never be more than that which the nature of the government made them.”¹¹ If human dignity calls for a moral vocation beyond the current form of government, then the task is *political*, for it is the polity that shapes its own mores. In Kant’s reading of Rousseau, the legislator is ultimately a ruse; it is not he who solves the double bind from a position outside of society, but the people themselves who solve the dilemma through reference to the legislator. It is solely in the power of the people to alter their own mores. Thus we ought to view *On the Social Contract* “only as a guiding thread for finding our way out of the labyrinth of evil with which our species has surrounded itself by its own fault” (*APV*

232). It was this insight that so profoundly ruptured Kant's speculative quest for truth in order to restore dignity to every citizen: "Rousseau has set me right. This blinding prejudice vanishes, I learn to honor human beings, and I would feel by far less useful than the common laborer if I did not believe that this [philosophy] could impart a value to all others in order to establish the rights of humanity."¹²

The spiritual character of art

By connecting Rousseau and Kant in terms of the separation between mores and morality, we find a particular connection between Rousseau's proposal in *On the Social Contract* and Kant's new effort to solve the double bind in *Critique of Judgment*. In order to understand Kant's response, it is necessary to give close attention to the development of his project from 1787 to its publication in 1790. In this section I trace this development through his understanding of genius. In the final drafts of *Critique of Judgment*, Kant employs the notion of genius to unite art history and morality in the same aesthetic project. This unity turns on the creative ability of human agents to realize the ideas of reason in sensuous life, orienting their community to the collective task of autonomy.

Up until the final drafts of *Critique of Judgment* written in 1789, Kant remained critical of the spontaneous creativity of genius in the work of Young, Baumgarten, Herder, Mendelssohn, Hume, and others. In a letter to his student Herder in 1768, Kant warns against the excesses of "genius," contrasting the "youthful feeling" of genius to the "sensitive tranquillity" of philosophy.¹³ In the preface to the second edition of *Critique of Pure Reason* written in 1787, Kant contrasts the rigorous path of criticism with the German obsession with genius (Bxliii). Even in the first drafts of his third *Critique* Kant undertakes the critique of taste with no reference to genius at all. Given the importance of genius to eighteenth-century aesthetics, this absence is noteworthy. Kant's aim was to provide a purely transcendental account of taste against the speculative systems we find in Herder and the *Sturm und Drang* movement.

However, in the later drafts of the third *Critique* written between the late summer of 1789 and the early months of 1790, Kant explores the notion of genius as the exemplary use of the productive imagination he elaborated in his account of reflective judgment. Something led Kant to move from his purely transcendental analysis of taste. Something led him

to reconsider the notion of genius as the expression of freedom within the sensuous bounds of experience. While Baumgarten identified genius as the harmonious use of the faculties that results from significant training, Kant now stresses that genius is “the talent (natural gift) that gives the rule to art, . . . an inborn productive faculty of the artist” (*CJ* 5:307). Because genius is given, it “belongs to nature,” meaning that the artist is not limited to the categorical determination of the mind but operates in the domain of nature, of freedom. Yet the freedom of the artist is not unfettered or chaotic, for the artist “ventures to make sensible rational ideas . . . beyond the limits of experience” (*CJ* 5:314). The “making sensible” of rational ideas cannot be reached by reason but can only be achieved by a poetic kind of thinking that is characteristic of genius. While it is clear that Kant wants to put transcendental breaks on the synthetic account of genius given by Herder, it seems that he found the notion of genius to provide a grammar capable of articulating the work of nature in the subject, making it possible to give sensuous expression to rational ideas. The artworks we attribute to genius provide confirmation of the viability of freedom, meaning that nature is able to express its unlimited power through human *praxis*.

In order to explain how nature could act in the artist in such a way that allows her to move beyond the limits of experience, Kant requires a new aesthetic category capable of displacing her from these limits through an encounter with something greater. He identifies this experience in the sublime. While the beautiful provides the possibility of the conception of nature as art, allowing us to reconcile the theoretical and practical spheres in an enlarged concept of nature, it shows us nothing of the purposiveness that lies in ourselves. By introducing the sublime in the 1789 drafts of the third *Critique*, Kant identifies an aesthetic judgment that can expand our concept of nature, not one that indicates a “purpose in nature itself,” as does the beautiful, but one that occasions “the possible *use* of its intuitions to make palpable in ourselves a purposiveness that is entirely independent of nature” (*CJ* 5:246).¹⁴

The significance of the sublime for Kant’s ethical turn is that it occasions an experience in which intuition—the faculty that presents nonconceptualized representations in the imagination—encounters that which is beyond nature, namely, reason itself. This encounter provides a sensuous experience of an inner purposiveness in ourselves that is independent of nature. Kant states that the experience of the sublime constitutes an encounter with the “*absolutely great*” (*CJ* 5:248), either in the vastness of the “mathematical sublime” or the power of the “dynamical sublime” (*CJ* 5:247).

Rather than the “calm contemplation” we experience in judgments of beauty, in judgments of sublimity the “mind finds itself moved” (*CJ* 5:257). Such an encounter, whether in the limitless sky, a lofty mountain, or the chaotic sea, makes us feel “the inadequacy of our capacity for the attainment of an idea,” for no idea can be found that is adequate to the formlessness of the absolutely great. What is absolutely great is that which causes us to consider all things as small when they are drawn into comparison. Yet no mere thing, no object of nature, can have this characteristic. The absolutely great is not found outside of us but refers to what is inside, to reason.

The significance of Kant’s new account of the imagination’s encounter with reason lies in its capacity to enlarge the imagination to go beyond its sensible limits. In the determinative operation of judgment, imagination is limited to sensibility, for it combines intuitions of nature with the concepts that nature has born in the understanding. In judgments of the sublime, the harmony of judgment is momentarily disrupted, which, given cognition’s desire for unity, produces the feeling of displeasure. Unlike the beautiful, the sublime does not provide an arena for the imagination and sensibility to play freely in mutual harmony. Rather, the feelings we experience in the sublime alert us to the fact that it is “not play but something serious in the activity of the imagination” that is occurring (*CJ* 5:245). Through coming into contact with reason, the sublime involves an intuition (i.e., an empirical perception) of the indeterminate. The sublime thus has a paradoxical effect, for it is in the inhibition of the power of judgment to determine an object that enlarges the imagination to form a schema of the infinite and to use this empirically derived schema of infinitude in practical life.¹⁵ While the sublime manifests itself through the experience of nature, judgments of sublimity lie in the mind, which discovers its own essential superiority over nature.¹⁶

This paradoxical process that characterizes the sublime occurs in the following way. Through coming into contact with reason, the imagination—the faculty that is limited to sensibility—is expanded so that it is able to make present the negative idea of the unattainability of nature. Reason expands the imagination, opening it to the field of the infinite. Thus imagination discovers in its possession an infinite power greater than any realm of representation or dogma. In Kant’s words, the sublime “is an object (of nature) the representation of which determines the mind to think of the unattainability of nature as a presentation of ideas” (*CJ* 5:268). The representation of the unrepresentable determines the mind to think of something negative—the unattainability of nature—as an intimation of the infinite domain of ideas. Nature itself alerts us to “a finality quite indepen-

dent of nature" (*CJ* 5:246), that is, our own finality as moral agents. Thus the moral law claims its validity and is released into the sensory world as a guiding principle.

By alerting us to our moral vocation, the sublime affords a kind of passage from the realm of the theoretical (nature) to the realm of the practical (morality), for the excess of nature alerts us to the practical task of judgment. It follows that the realization of our moral vocation does not begin by legislating the practical domain according to the laws of reason, but by leaving the subject to his or her own devices as the beautiful form crumbles at freedom's expense.¹⁷ In other words, Kant asserts that it is nature that provides the ground for the moral project: nature, which occasions the sublime, pushes us toward our moral calling "in order to enlarge [the imagination] in a way suitable for its own proper domain (the practical) and to allow it to look out upon the infinite, which for sensibility is an abyss [*Abgrund*]" (*CJ* 5:265). The abyss does not threaten to swallow our sensory endeavors in its voiding presence but occasions a creative, transubstantiating experience. The abyss awakens the imagination to reason's infinite grasp and the practical possibilities that are revealed within the disruption of causal necessity. The alarming indeterminacy of the abyss means that the sublime itself is not a passage, but that it opens up the possibility of a passage being built by human *praxis*.

Kant portrays genius as the ability to turn this experience of the sublime into a work that sets an example for how others might experience nature in the same way. This occurs through the symbolic presentation of the unattainability of nature. One thinks of romantic works created in the years following *Critique of Judgment*, such as Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* or J. M. W. Turner's *A Disaster at Sea*, works of art that invite the spectator to join in the artist's own experience of the sublime. Such works do not imitate nature, or in other words, they are not the products of *techne*. Rather, they are genuinely creative, using nature as a schema for presenting the supersensible in the form of a negative feeling that quickens our sense of moral vocation. Romantic poet John Keats describes the power released in the sublime as the "*Negative Capability*" of the mind, expressing the romantic connection between sublimity and autonomy.¹⁸ According to Keats, the negativity of the mind's capability lies in its ability to dwell "in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."¹⁹ Similarly to Kant, Keats identifies the capacity of the sublime to enliven our noumenal feelings, placing us before the practical task of making laws for ourselves in the space that emerges

within the collision of the traditional order and the creative emergence of the new. It is not a spontaneous act of reason but the excessive generosity of nature that originally spurs us toward this moral task.²⁰ It is the work of the genius to make this experience intelligible.

Kant's account of genius serves as a productive counterpart to taste, which ultimately allows Kant to house the moral project in the shared life of a historical community. The communicative power of the artist is expressed when his or her imaginative material takes on a form that combines genius with taste: "Taste, like judgment in general, is the discipline (or training) of genius" (*CJ* 5:319). Genius without taste is incommunicable, because it is a break with convention and has no determinate content. Donald Crawford describes Kant's understanding of artistic creativity as a process through which "taste guides the creative imagination of the artist as to how far the imagination may extend itself and still be able to be communicated."²¹ While Crawford is right, it is also important to note that the combination of taste and genius marks a particular development from his initial critique of taste. Kant identifies taste as "the judging of beautiful objects" and genius as "the producing of such objects" (*CJ* 5:311). While his initial transcendental deduction of taste provides a new procedure for judging with the form of purposiveness as its ground, his inclusion of the concepts of genius and the sublime in the final drafts of the third *Critique* identifies the capacity of human *praxis* to produce works of art that orient a community toward good taste, to the collective use of the procedure Kant's critique of taste aims to instill in his reader. Thus the concept of genius is ultimately Kant's strategy for housing his project in shared, ethical life, for compulsion without violence and persuasion without conviction.

By combining genius and taste, Kant suggests that art is not limited to form but communicates (expresses) something that goes beyond appearance. In the first two *Critiques* Kant argued that we give rule to nature in knowledge (objects must conform to our knowledge) and to ourselves in ethical determination (the categorical imperative). In the third *Critique*, the aesthetic law emerges as a consequence of nature acting in the subject. In genius we find "the inborn predisposition of the mind [*ingenium*] through which nature" manifests its freedom (*CJ* 5:307). In works of art, the ideas of reason become intelligible in sensuous form, which is to say that the practical sphere becomes incarnate in the domain of nature through human *praxis*.

Kant's notion of genius draws from the enlarged concept of nature he discovered through presenting the antinomy of teleological judgment. By

arguing that the antinomy of teleological judgment is only solved when we approach nature as “an analogue of life” (*CJ* 5:375), Kant demonstrates the necessity of thinking of nature as a formative, self-organizing power that communicates itself through products. In the beautiful we find that nature expresses itself, and, by identifying the work of genius as the work of nature, Kant now identifies the self-expression of nature in the domain of culture. This argument does not entail that we are entitled to judge nature as spontaneously moral, that is, that it is on a trajectory toward ever-growing moral progress. Kant holds steadfast to the conviction that the only final end (*der Endzweck*) of which we are cognizant lies in ourselves as noumenal creatures (*CJ* 5:435). Yet in the Methodology of Teleological Judgment he concludes that the expression of nature in the cultural sphere gives us warrant to judge another kind of end, an ultimate end (*der letzte Zweck*), that is manifest *within* nature: “In order . . . to discover where in the human being we are at least to posit that ultimate end of nature, we must seek out that which nature is *capable of doing in order to prepare him for what he must himself do in order to be a final end*” (*CJ* 5:431, my emphasis). While nature cannot produce freedom, for freedom remains unconditioned, it can prepare human beings for the effective realization of their moral calling. This is precisely what Kant describes in terms of culture: “The production of the aptitude of a rational being for any ends in general (thus those of his freedom) is culture [*Kultur*]. Thus only culture can be the ultimate end that one has cause to ascribe to nature in regard to the human species” (*CJ* 5:431). Kant implies that nature can be changed by human *praxis*, and thus the task of philosophy is to outline a procedure for the enhancement of nature.

Kant’s understanding of the cooperation of nature and human *praxis* places *Critique of Judgment* much closer to Herder and the *Sturm und Drang* movement than his former critical work. For Zammito, this shift toward historical thinking is best understood as a response to “the events taking place simultaneously in France.” Kant engaged with the rapidly changing world of the late-1780s by moving away from “his harshly Hobbesian orientation and closer, if not to Herder, then to that generation which inherited Herder’s agenda.”²² While the Idealist view of the philosophy of tragedy claims that it is Schelling who draws Kant’s project together in his notion of tragedy, Schelling himself identifies Kant’s notion of art in his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) as the means by which the critical project is brought together into a whole. In Schelling’s words, the work of art is the “synthesis of nature and freedom,” meaning that “in every task that art has discharged, an infinite contradiction is reconciled.”²³ Schelling saw

that Kant's engagement with teleology led to the culmination of critical philosophy. Such a production cannot be explained by what precedes it, either historically or psychologically, for the genius cannot explain from whence her inspiration came or give a coherent account of her creation (*CJ* 5:308–309). Artistic genius is only possible if it results from an activity for which no determinate rule can be given, meaning that it expands our awareness of what nature is.

Synthesizing nature and freedom

Thus far I have argued that the significance of Kant's account of genius lies in the connection it draws between art and the human vocation for freedom, a freedom that is not simply presumed by but is manifest in the creation of works of art. This freedom is not expressed through a conception of artistic skill modeled on Aristotle's *techné*, which gives form to unformed matter according to preestablished rules. Rather, it is expressed through the ability of genius to create rules. The freedom of art is a transgressive freedom, for it interrupts previous art history in order for that history to begin anew. In this section I show how Kant's transgressive notion of beautiful art provides a way to navigate the double bind of his philosophy, that is, the irresolvable tension between reason and history.

In §44 Kant describes the kind of art that manifests transgressive creativity as *schöne Kunst*, translated literally by Geyer as “beautiful art.” Yet *schöne Kunst* is not merely art that is beautiful, for it idiomatically connotes the “fine arts,” that is, art that is in some sense canonical or part of a historical artistic tradition. Geyer preserves Kant's play on the word “beautiful” in order to show the continuity between the transgressive freedom manifest in the beautiful and the historical dimension of the fine arts. To clarify the distinction between what is merely beautiful and the transgressive freedom of beautiful art, Jay Bernstein translates *schöne Kunst* as “great art,” capturing Kant's reference to artifacts of fine art that have epochal significance.²⁴ Kant identifies the definitive feature of *schöne Kunst* in terms of its autonomy, holding that works of art must not be determined by a human end (buildings, columns, etc.) but must be final and without an end. He states that beautiful art “is a kind of representation that is purposive in itself and, though without an end, nevertheless promotes the cultivation of the mental powers for sociable communication” (*CJ* 5:306).

By insisting that beautiful art is without end, Kant argues that it does not only presuppose freedom but that it manifests freedom. Bernstein draws out the expressive dimension of beautiful art by describing it as the “production of freedom through freedom.”²⁵ Because beautiful art is expressive of human freedom, Kant argues that it is spiritual; it has a different quality to natural beauty because it is a product of human creativity. According to Kant, art that merely imitates nature (mimetic art) in an “accurate and well organized” manner is “without spirit [*Geist*],” for it fails to set “the mental powers into motion” (*CJ* 5:313). In beautiful art, on the other hand, “spirit is the animating [i.e., natural] principle,” meaning that the causality of the artwork lies in the unlimited domain of nature.

Kant’s identification of the spiritual dimension of beautiful art serves to fuse the work of nature and human *praxis* into the same creative project. As the work of genius, spiritual art occasions an expansive experience for its audience, containing the ability to make universally communicable “the ineffable element in the state of mind” (*CJ* 5:317). This implies that such art, as the work of genius, does not merely entertain; it symbolizes rational ideas, thereby giving sensuous form to our moral vocation. As Lambert Zuidervaart explains, spirit is thus “the talent for finding aesthetic ideas to symbolize rational ideas as well as the artistic means to communicate the mental state accompanying both kinds of ideas.”²⁶ The capacity of spirit to symbolize rational ideas entails that spirit and genius can be used interchangeably. Giorgio Tonelli draws our attention to the proximity of genius and spirit, suggesting that both find their ground in the locus of nature in humanity that is “spontaneous, free, cannot be accounted for, it is the power enabling man to reach some otherwise unattainable analogue to God’s ideas.”²⁷ In other words, Kant’s notion of spirit refigures the subject as a part of nature. Thus understood, genius is both nature *and* subject; it is the freedom of nature expressing itself through the subject and the subject expressing itself through freedom.

The importance of Kant’s notion of beautiful art for his attempt to confront the double bind that inhibits the moral project lies, first, in his recognition that reason alone cannot reconcile the natural and moral orders and, second, in his suggestion that we must create a world in which it makes sense to live. Kant’s recognition of the failure of philosophy to reconcile reason and nature suggests that philosophy’s traditional project has reached its limit and that art must take over its role of searching for a “fundamental principle” to guide the realization of our moral ends. Thus he proposes that this task is the responsibility of the productive imagination, which we see expressed in the example given by genius. Because the imagination is “a

productive cognitive faculty,” Kant states that it is “very powerful in creating, as it were, another nature, out of the material which the real one gives it” (*CJ* 5:314). Through the productive power of imagination, nature “can be transformed by us into something entirely different, namely into that which steps beyond nature.” We do well to look closely at these words, for they are immensely important for understanding the overall project of the *Critique of Judgment*. Kant stresses that the productive notion of imagination does not imitate nature but contains a “mighty” power to “create” another nature out of the material given to it. Due to the ability of the imagination to “transform” natural material into another nature, the ideas crafted by judgment restructure experience. The imagination is thus “world-making,” to use Nelson Goodman’s terms, meaning that our imaginative frame in which the world appears has the nature of a creative work, and the shared symbolic world is a product of our aesthetic endeavor.²⁸ Nature and culture become two sides of the same project.

What is significant about Kant’s understanding of beautiful art for his attempt to reconcile transcendental morality and history is that it puts forward a picture of freedom that does not present itself to us in a vacuum of ideal thought but is manifest through sensuous expression in material life. Freedom cannot come through the attempt to bracket off one’s cultural mores in the attempt to legislate the world according to transcultural, rational principles, for such an approach fails to overcome the divide between reason and culture, between philosophy and practice. Rather, freedom is expressed through employing the established symbolic field of reference in order to go beyond it, meaning that it is the very things that limit the subject that make the “going beyond” of freedom possible. As Brigitte Sasen describes, the task of creative action is not to “conjure up novel ideas by following some rule or other; the ideas are novel precisely because they break out of the realm of established rules.”²⁹ By detaching the artwork from the limitations of the subject, the being of the work cannot be traced causally. If it is not the individual subject but freedom in nature that expresses itself in beautiful art, then we find both a sensuous expression of nature (an enlarged conception of nature that is expressive) and a consilience between the end of nature and the end of humanity.

The consilience of the end of nature and the end of humanity is best seen in Kant’s notion of the aesthetic idea.³⁰ The very notion of an aesthetic idea is remarkable given that it unifies two regions that have been strictly kept apart in Kant’s account of cognition: sensation and reason. He describes an aesthetic idea as

. . . a representation of the imagination, associated with a given concept, which is combined with such a manifold of partial representations in the free use of the imagination that no expression designating a determinate concept can be found for it, which therefore allows the addition to a concept of much that is unnameable, the feeling of which animates the cognitive faculties and combines spirit with the mere letter of language. (*CJ* 5:316)

Aesthetic ideas are analogous to the ideas of reason, for they gather disparate phenomena under the unity of an idea that is *aesthetic*, or sensuously derived. They are expansive rather than determinative, meaning that they “go beyond the bounds of experience” (*CJ* 5:314). Thus they are inexhaustible in our contemplation of them, for they do not determine what they represent but combine a “manifold of partial representations.” While this combination lacks the necessity of the concepts of the understanding, they are not entirely without reason. In Kant’s terms, aesthetic ideas “strive toward something lying beyond the bounds of experience [thus seeking] to approximate a presentation of concepts of reason.”³¹ In other words, they are the building blocks of our “second nature,” for they give incarnate form to the transcendent idea; they fuse the particular dimensions of spirit with the corporate dimension of language.

Kant identifies the greatest example of an aesthetic idea in the art of poetry. In “the art of poetry,” he states, “the faculty of aesthetic ideas can reveal itself in its full measure.” The poet

ventures to make sensible rational ideas . . . as well as to make that of which there are examples in experience, e.g., death, envy, and all sorts of vices, as well as love, fame, etc., sensible beyond the limits of experience, with a completeness that goes beyond anything of which there is an example in nature, by means of an imagination that emulates the precedent of reason in attaining to a maximum. (*CJ* 5:314)

Just as the productive imagination schematizes the categories of the understanding so that the ideas of reason are applied in the sensible world, poetry makes sensible rational ideas. In other words, poets produce symbols: indirect, figurative presentations of concepts that are not determinate but that “strain toward something lying beyond the bounds of experience . . . because no concept can be fully adequate to them, as inner intuitions.” Their work

is expressive, not formalist or mimetic, because it “judges” nature by giving expression to ideas for which nature can provide no adequate form. Moreover, the symbols are beautiful and, as the indirect presentation of rational ideas, express our moral vocation. Thus Kant moves from his earlier insistence that moral action is dispassionate by identifying that aesthetic ideas are desirable, for they are symbols of the morally good. As Zuidervaart states, they “can attractively indicate the morally good to be something . . . not merely obligatory.”³² While the concepts of the understanding are demonstrable, and thus can be “readily learnt” (*CJ* 5:308–309), the poet’s work is exemplary, empowering us to join in the poet’s creative endeavor.

The ability of the poet to consider and judge nature, to see nature as more than mechanism and to put it to creative work, is important for Kant’s attempt to find a thematic basis that could reconcile the theoretical and practical spheres. While the supersensible basis to the theoretical and practical orders “can never be elevated and expanded into a cognition” (*CJ* 5:175), poetic language manifests the ability to use nature as a schema in order to govern the application of supersensibility. Kant states that the art of poetry “claims the highest rank of all” (*CJ* 5:326). It “expands the mind by setting the imagination free and presenting” a sensuous manifold “that connects its presentation with a fullness of thought to which no linguistic expression is fully adequate and thus elevates itself aesthetically to the level of ideas.” By taking us beyond what is linguistically possible to the level of ideas, poetry “strengthens the mind by letting it feel its capacity [*Vermögen*] to consider and judge of [*zu beurtheilen*] nature, as appearance, freely, self-actively, and independently of determination by nature, . . . and thus to use it for the sake of and as it were as the schema of the supersensible” (*CJ* 5:326). Poetry expresses the imagination’s formative capacity to schematize what resists presentation, using nature to express what goes beyond nature. Kant introduced the concept of the schema in *Critique of Pure Reason* as a bridge between the heterogeneous poles of thought and sensation, making “possible the application of the former to the latter” (*CPR* A138/B177).³³ In this framework, the possibility of schematizing the supersensible contains the solution to Kant’s intention to reconcile the critical system under a common, supersensible ground. This solution is not a product of philosophy; it is experienced in our encounter with nature and communicated by poetry.

Kant’s solution to philosophy’s failure to reconcile morality and nature, which can be considered as the tragedy of philosophy, is to outline a way of thinking that recognizes the symbolic sphere at the heart of collective

life as a historical project that reconciles morality and nature. The task of the philosopher is not to unify the theoretical and the practical spheres in conceptual thought but to identify the symbolic realm outside of ourselves in which this unity appears. The failure of philosophy to reconcile nature and reason is mirrored by the failure of what Kant calls “mechanical art,” which is “a mere art of diligence and learning” (*CJ* 5:310). Art that is purely genius can also fail at this task, however, for genius “can only provide the material for products of art; its elaboration and form require a talent that has been academically trained” (*CJ* 5:310). The task of the philosopher, then, is to elucidate the nature of the symbolic sphere in such a way that trains the public to recognize beautiful art, that is, art that combines genius and training. One might say that such a task is therapeutic, aimed at cleansing our drive toward objective knowledge and pointing us toward the interpersonal realm of creative *praxis*. In the wake of the immense progress occurring in the aesthetic sphere during his lifetime, Kant defines the task of philosophy as unearthing the project underpinning the capacity of the artist to reconcile the moral and natural parts of our being. His acknowledgment of the tragedy of philosophy undermines philosophy’s traditional hegemony over the aesthetic sphere, thereby transforming the task of philosophy from one of legislating society according to philosophically defined ends to one of outlining the procedure by which society can give law to itself.

An enlarged way of thinking

So far I have suggested that by emphasizing the essentially transgressive creativity of genius as a power capable of generating aesthetic ideas, Kant illuminates a fresh way of conceiving nature in terms of self-expression but also a new way of thinking about historical modes of figuring nature through the sphere of art history. In this final section I suggest that Kant’s identification of the creativity of imagination situates history, understood as the shared sphere of aesthetic ideas, as the fulcrum around which collective life turns. This historical dimension of the critical project allows Kant to situate his enlarged procedure in the ethical life of a community, or in Rousseau’s terms, in a community’s mores. Kant further differentiates the task of confronting reason’s double bind from the individual task of legislating the practical sphere according to reason, as rather a collective project spurred on by exemplary acts of creativity. In so doing, Kant subverts and displaces the paradigm of the philosopher-king attempting to restructure the

practical domain in accordance with the imperatives of reason and resituates the moral project as a creative and collective endeavor.

Kant's understanding of beautiful art implies a principle of artistic process in which art works destroy established rules in order to give new ones. The work of art, the highest form of which is poetry, gives rule to art by using nature to schematize what is beyond nature, giving us "an example" of the kind of creativity it takes to realize our moral calling in sensuous life (*CJ* 5:318). Through the "emulation" of this example, the other is "thereby awakened to the feeling of his own originality, to exercise freedom from coercion in his art in such a way that the latter thereby itself acquires a new rule, by which the talent shows itself as exemplary" (*CJ* 5:318). Beautiful art gives a new rule, one that draws its audience into an experience of imaginative expansion. Because this new rule is given by an act of transgressive creativity, Kant explains that the sphere of art history manifests a "lawfulness without law" (*Gesetzmässigkeit ohne Gesetz*) that is an equal counterpart to nature's purposiveness without purpose. It is lawful to the extent that it gives an example to other artists and to the observing public, and yet it is lawless to the extent that it resides beyond the transcendental constitution of the mind; there is no law that is necessarily and sufficient to explain the forms that emerge.

Kant's notion of the rule-giving, generative capacity of beautiful art provides a solution to reason's double bind, which becomes clear in his notion of *sensus communis*. *Sensus communis* expresses a community bound by a common mode of judgment. Such a community is not an objective reality but rather an "indeterminate norm [that is] presupposed by us: our presumption in making judgments of taste proves that" (*CJ* 5:239–240). As a norm, it operates as a regulative *a priori* for judgment, affording a critical distance from current modes of taste and allowing us to judge with the standard of mutual communicability as our ground. Yet Kant does not limit *sensus communis* simply to aesthetic judgment but rather insists that it is "the necessary condition of the universal communicability of our cognition, which is assumed in every logic and every principle of cognitions that is not skeptical" (*CJ* 5:239). Thus *sensus communis* has a proto-moral character wherein one claims for oneself and demands of the other that the claims that pass between them, like practical claims, are not determined by their own narrow interests but aspire to universality.

In §40 Kant explains the normative dimension of *sensus communis* by distinguishing it from the notion of common sense posited by the British empiricists such as Locke and Hume. In Kant's view, the British empiricists

saw common sense as an established mode of making sense of the world that is held in common. This notion of common sense detaches taste from reason. It is an existing standard, thereby deeming the established common sense to remain separate from rationality. Alternatively, Kant informs us that *sensus communis* is

the idea of a communal sense [*gemeinschaftlicher Sinn*], i.e., a faculty for judging that in its reflection takes account (*a priori*) of everyone else's way of representing in thought, in order as it were to hold its judgment up to human reason as a whole and thereby avoid the illusion which, from subjective private conditions that could easily be held to be objective, would have a detrimental influence on the judgment. (*CJ* 5:293)

A community bound by a communal sense is capable of abstracting from the particular vantage of immediate subjective representation to generate an intersubjective perspective. This intersubjective perspective turns on the *a priori* expressed in judgments of taste: the assumption of the intersubjective similarity of the faculties of judgment. While vulgar common sense designates beliefs that are immediately held in a community, *sensus communis* is an *a priori* sense that relates us to *all* of humanity. In Kant's terms, aesthetic judgment does not "postulate agreement," which would require a community that is already united by a common taste. Rather, it "requires agreement," expressing a call for a future community united by a rational procedure of judging (see *CJ* §8). Because the notion of taste assumes community, *sensus communis* is necessary for aesthetic judgment.

The difference between "postulating" and "requiring" agreement alerts us to the proximity of Kant's notion of the *sensus communis* to the two "orders" of legislation identified by Rousseau, one that can coerce and expect agreement and the other that can compel without violence and persuade without convincing. This proximity can be understood in terms of Rousseau's distinction between the private and the general will. For Rousseau, it is impossible for the private will to be concordant with the general will in an enduring way, for "by its nature the private will tends toward having preferences, and the general will tends toward equality."³⁴ In both the *Second Discourse* and *Emile*, he identifies education as the key to the convergence of the private and the general will.³⁵ Like Rousseau, Kant also recognizes the importance of separating the private and general will. However, he seeks to ground our orientation toward the general will on the existing practice

of aesthetic judgment. Unlike Rousseau's general will, *sensus communis* is not an abstract ideal that is separate from lived experience. Rather, it is a presumption that is made in every judgment of taste. The practical claims of a community united by a *sensus communis* take the same rational structure as judgments of taste, where "one ascribes the satisfaction in an object to everyone, yet without grounding it on a concept" (*CJ* 5:214). A judgment of taste "makes supposedly generally valid (public) judgments." It does not "expect" such assent in each of its judgments but "demands such assent universally."

The significance of Kant's notion of *sensus communis* is that it ties the realization of the moral project together with aesthetic creativity. Just as the imagination "orients" us spatially by representing the world in reference to our sensory experience, figuring left and right and up and down not in terms of an intuition but a feeling, Kant argues that the *sensus communis* orients us to our community in such a way that mutual communicability becomes the ground of judgment.³⁶ If it is mutual communicability that grounds reflective judgment, and if reflective judgment reconciles morality and nature through aesthetic creativity, then it seems that the notion of the *sensus communis* opens the possibility of connecting morality and aesthetics. Jane Kneller captures this well, suggesting that *sensus communis* entails that "political and moral progress may be intimately connected with our ability to make universally valid aesthetic judgments."³⁷ Kneller assists us to see that despite the fact that theoretical philosophy renders morality and aesthetics as separated by an abyss, when morality is recast as a collective project it is increasingly caught up in the aesthetic sense of the community. Zuidervaart describes this turn in terms of Kant's development of "ethical hermeneutics," a holistic understanding of the human being in which "knowing and acting can coincide in respect to truth."³⁸ This entails that art takes on a distinctive role in providing a medium in which we can see ourselves reflected, and the *sensus communis* becomes a context in which "an overriding concern for the process of interpretation through which rational morality can be enacted and not merely conceptualized."³⁹ In short, *sensus communis* outlines a procedure through which the heteronomous use of reason can be transformed in the direction of autonomy.

The connection between the moral project and aesthetics is seen in the procedure identified in the previous chapter that ensures that the use of reason does not become heteronomous, namely, heautonomy. For Kant, resisting the heteronomy of reason is first a matter of the heautonomous use of reason, for unlike autonomy, it begins when all interest in cognition

is suspended. This is particularly evident in the third maxim required for autonomy that Kant identifies, the maxim of an “enlarged way of thinking” (*CJ* 5:239). The maxim of the enlarged way of thinking echoes the expansion of the imagination undergone in the experience of the sublime, for it presupposes our supersession of vulgar common sense for *sensus communis*. Enlarged thinking refrains from legislating according to subjective principles and instead undertakes the procedure of “comparing our judgment with the possible rather than the actual judgment of others” (*CJ* 5:294). In other words, enlarged thinking is a possibility of human thought opened by the acknowledgment of what Kant’s successors describe in terms of the tragedy of philosophy, the failure of philosophy to unify the ideas of reason with sensuous life. It embodies a procedure that is adequate to the conditions of interpersonal life whereby no appeal can be made to a theoretical standard. Only then can thinking become autonomous.

By identifying the enlarged way of thinking as the product of a community united by the reflective use of judgment, Kant ties the fate of autonomy to the aesthetic, symbolic sphere of collective representation. Reflective judgment, genius, and *sensus communis* all serve to harmonize aesthetic and moral culture, making the rule-giving activity of nature through the expansion of the sublime and the schematizing work of art regulative over aesthetics. Yet in another sense, the aesthetic sphere becomes the means by which a community is set on the path to autonomy, meaning that the exercise of reason becomes subject to the creative *praxis* of a community.⁴⁰ In short, by refusing to ground the critical project in either cognition or morality, Kant’s harmonization of aesthetic and moral culture through the historical dimension of *sensus communis* does not leave the aesthetic and the moral sphere on equal footing. Rather, it identifies the primacy of the aesthetic sphere in regulating our orientation to morality, even if the moral ought to govern the aesthetic. If humans require sensuous confirmation of the viability of the moral project, then it seems that our attunement to reason is dependent on our material conditions. Thus the first task of philosophy, in its efforts to realize the moral calling of humanity, is not to legislate the practical sphere according to reason but to alert the community to the aesthetic sphere in which the moral project is always and already being realized in their midst and, moreover, to identify that every judgment made by every citizen is constitutive of this project.⁴¹

Interpreting *Critique of Judgment* as the blueprint for an enlarged procedure for thinking highlights Kant’s understanding of history as the domain in which the dualism between nature and reason is harmonized

through creative human *praxis*. Kant's conception of history identifies two vital elements of nature: that nature can be changed through human *praxis*, and that nature acts in ways that stimulate human *praxis* in the direction of moral transformation.⁴² Or to draw these elements together, nature is purposive to the extent that all its parts work toward its ultimate end: the realization of moral freedom. Zammito captures this well, stating that throughout *Critique of Judgment* history becomes "a realm between nature and freedom: the record of the interventions of freedom in the world of mechanical causality and the string of their consequences."⁴³ The significance of Kant's understanding of history as a dialectic between nature and freedom is that it does not advance a historical model that progresses according to a mechanical or natural law. Rather, it advances an idea of history as the open, human attempt to reconcile morality with nature. Thus Kant overcomes the double bind generated by critical philosophy by recognizing the radical creativity by which human action transfigures the apparent determinism of the natural order into a domain of freedom.

Kant knew well that as moral agents we are constantly confronted with evidence that the natural world does not accommodate moral intuition, that, as it were, *Astraea* has departed the earth's shores.⁴⁴ He recognized that we are regularly faced with unrewarded, and thwarted, virtue. In his efforts to outline a procedure for philosophy that would reconcile the moral project with history, *Critique of Judgment* can be understood as a sustained reflection on how we are to find hope in a world inhospitable to our moral vocation. While society remains less than that civil society of ends where moral and aesthetic culture cohere, while we have no guarantee that moral action will find moral ends, Kant anchors our ability to belong in the world to our production of aesthetic ideas that enliven and vivify our moral calling.

The task that remains after Kant's *Critique of Judgment* is to search for a language, a form of art, adequate to this calling. In §52, Kant notes a medium that might be capable of the task, stating that "the presentation of the sublime, so far as it belongs to beautiful art, can be united with beauty in a verse tragedy [*Trauerspiel*]" (*CJ* 5:325).⁴⁵ He does not develop this observation, however, for he recognizes that the task of reconciling morality and history is not the task of the philosopher but of the citizenry. For Kant, the task of philosophy is to find a method that ennobles the citizen to undertake this creative task.

Part II

Tragedy after Kant

Hegel

The Philosophy of Tragedy

They are gripped and shattered by something intrinsic to their own actual being.

—G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics*

Kant's acknowledgment of the failure of philosophy to grasp and subdue nature prompted the discovery of a new form of philosophical thought. This new form of thought hinges upon the creative potential of the imagination to operate beyond the limits of the understanding, guided by the principle of mutual communicability. Kant goes to great lengths to stress that this form of thought does not yield knowledge. Indeed, the very discovery of the principle of aesthetic judgment turns on the acknowledgment of the recondite nature of the aesthetic. Kant's basic idea that reflective judgment enables us to approach nature "as if" it were consonant with our epistemic and moral ambitions thereby reconciles the theoretical and practical spheres in a judgment that is purely subjective.

Hegel recognized that Kant's notion of aesthetic judgment constituted a significant advance in philosophical thinking. What was of particular interest to Hegel was that Kant's desire to "think" the unity of critical philosophy, through reflecting on the feeling of vitality produced in aesthetic judgments, went a long way to reconcile traditional dualisms such as body and mind, feeling and thought, and reason and sense in a conception of embodied experience. However, Hegel was unsatisfied by Kant's refusal to grant aesthetic judgment the condition of knowledge. While Kant concluded that the end of nature can be felt in aesthetic judgments and thus thought by reason, aesthetic judgments remain judgments "as if," while knowledge is limited

to what can be produced by determinant judgment. Hegel argued that this conclusion ultimately inhibits the critical project, for it retains the ideal of an infinite knowledge forever separate from the subject, that is, from the supposed origin of the entire critical edifice. While Kant went a long way to challenge the separation of reason and sense, Hegel claims that he failed to complete the critical system by grounding both modes of thinking in the knowing subject. The bridge between the practical and theoretical spheres remains a mere analogy, a symbol that invites our speculative interest only to deny us the satisfaction of drawing the whole system of thought into a finished system. To complete Kant's systematic ambitions, Hegel seeks to account for the emergence of reason within experience.

In the previous two chapters I argued that Kant's proposal of an enlarged way of thinking in *Critique of Judgment* can be understood as an implicit response to the tragedy that is specific to philosophy. This response entails a new procedure that begins with self-regulation, limiting the completion of the critical enterprise to aesthetic feeling as the grounds for an open project. In this chapter I aim to show that Hegel's attempt to bring Kant's project to its conclusion involves an *explicit* response to tragedy. Hegel turns to Greek tragedy as a temporally specific artistic genre that dramatizes the basic movement of thought. As we become aware of our errors, we come to see ourselves as actors on the stage of world history, baring roles and assumptions that are so close to us that they are difficult to see. In this sense freedom is not unfettered, existing in a noumenal realm that is only available to practical reason. Rather, it emerges from within the institutions and commitments that bind us as we come to greater levels of self-awareness. While the Kantian understanding is unable to reconcile our moral ideals with nature, Hegel argues that tragedy expresses a mode of thinking that is capable of raising nature and morality in a work that reconciles us to "the necessity of what happens":

The true development of the action consists solely in the cancellation of conflicts *as conflicts*, in the reconciliation of the powers animating action which struggled to destroy one another in their mutual conflict. Only in that case does finality lie not in misfortune and suffering but in the satisfaction of the spirit, because only with such a conclusion can the necessity of what happens to the individuals appear as absolute rationality, and only then can our hearts be morally at peace: shattered by the fate of the

heroes but reconciled fundamentally. Only by adherence to this view can Greek tragedy be understood. (LA 1215)

The striking feature of Hegel's theory of tragedy is that it occasions an experience that is both aesthetic and logical. While the work of Baumgarten and Kant made significant inroads to granting aesthetics the status of a science, aesthetics remained an inferior counterpart to theoretical philosophy. At best it bears an analogical relation to the strictures of rational inquiry. For Hegel, Greek tragedy reveals an "absolute rationality" in aesthetic experience that satisfies the speculative interest of reason for unified cognition.

Hegel's theory of tragedy has polarized critics. On one side, philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, A. C. Bradley, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Martha Nussbaum, and Sebastian Gardner argue that Hegel's theory of tragedy removes the insights of Kant's critical philosophy and returns to precritical metaphysics.¹ I will describe the view shared by these thinkers as the "Kantian's view," for its proponents are more inspired by Kant and early Romanticism than by Hegel. In the Kantian's view, Hegel's theory of tragedy does not heal Kant's divided philosophy. Rather, it occludes the critical insights of Kant's critique of substantial metaphysics. Hegel's philosophy is thus *anti*-tragic, for it covers the contingency of Kant's aesthetic sphere with a trajectory that cannot do other than to progress toward greater rationality. In recent years an alternative view has gained significant attention. Philosophers such as William Dudley, Stephen Houlgate, Theodore George, Robert Stern, Robert Williams, and Martin Thibodeau have proposed that Hegel does not break faith with tragic experience but allows philosophy to be transformed by tragic art.² I will call this the "metaphysical realist's view," for it suggests that Hegel restores content to Kant's attempt to limit metaphysics to thought, refiguring philosophy through Kant's reflections on art. Proponents of the metaphysical realist's view argue that Hegel does not depart from the critical paradigm but that he corrects it, revealing Kant's inability to break from traditional philosophy and thereby outlining a properly "tragic" philosophy, a philosophy that is unencumbered by external constraints.

In this chapter I examine Hegel's theory of tragedy in light of these two interpretations. I argue that the recent metaphysical realist's view identifies a significant weakness in the traditional Kantian view, for it identifies Hegel's insightful critique of Kant's theoretical assumptions. Yet I then argue that the metaphysical realist view fails to defend Hegel against a particular

attack made by the Kantians: Hegel undermines the significance of Kant's separation of philosophy from aesthetics. Rejecting Kant's attempt to outline a procedure for engaging with the recalcitrant particularity of the aesthetic sphere in terms of human *praxis*, Hegel builds a system of philosophy that claims to be consonant with the final cause emerging *in* the aesthetic sphere. I argue that this move identifies the importance of Kant's attempt to release action from theory only to conceal this insight in a new way, extending the traditional effort to seal philosophy's hegemony over the aesthetic sphere. With reference to Walter Benjamin I conclude that the way forward from Kant does not lie in speculative philosophy but in a representational account of aesthetics.

Aesthetics

To examine Hegel's theory of tragedy, we must begin by outlining the basic elements of his notoriously difficult aesthetics. Broadly, Hegel's aesthetics can be viewed as an attempt to reconcile the theoretical and practical spheres that, according to the second introduction of *Critique of Judgment*, are separated by an incalculable abyss. From as early as his essay *Faith and Knowledge* (1802), Hegel recognized that Kant's *Critique of Judgment* drew the two domains of philosophy together in his notion of a historical sphere governed by "lawfulness without law" (*Gesetzmässigkeit ohne Gesetz*). While rationalists such as Wolff saw the aesthetic sphere in terms of personal sentiment, Kant's notion of the productive ability of imagination to create aesthetic ideas identifies a symbolic sphere of ideas that are lawful to the extent that they bear an analogy with the concepts of the understanding but lawless to the extent that they do not belong to the theoretical sphere of fixity. The lawful lawfulness of the aesthetic sphere constitutes the "inner purposiveness" of the community, a fate to which all the members of the community are bound. For Kant, this purposiveness can only ever be thought of subjectively; it remains an analogy between our own purposefulness as rational agents and the contingent development of the aesthetic sphere.

Hegel saw that Kant's recognition of an aesthetic sphere that is both autonomous from the theoretical domain and yet lawful made a crucial contribution to the progress of philosophy. He explains that this move "resuscitated the Idea in general and especially the Idea of life" (*EL* 280). The Idea of life transposes the timeless and deathless idea of rationalist philosophy into the arena of change and decay, thereby identifying Being

in process, alteration, and becoming. Hegel is careful to say that this Idea was not “discovered” but “resuscitated” by Kant, for he is aware that it was originally presented in Aristotle’s philosophy. In *Physics*, Aristotle determines nature as internal finality, describing it as *arche kineseos kai staseos*, the “principle of change and rest immanent in all natural beings.”³ Hegel observes that this determination of nature “already contains this internal purposiveness; hence, it stands infinitely far above the concept of modern teleology which had only *finite*, or *external*, purposiveness in view” (EL 280). While Aristotle’s determination of life was occluded by the ontological commitments of traditional philosophy, which holds Being as timeless, impassable power, Hegel saw that the attention Kant gave to the failure of philosophy to provide exhaustive legislation of nature in *Critique of Judgment* allowed him to reopen philosophy’s perception of life.

Having noted Kant’s profound insight in the third *Critique*, Hegel then argues that Kant failed to grasp the fact that our judgments about nature’s purpose and the reality to which Kant always contrasted it are in fact one and the same.⁴ In *Encyclopaedia Logic* he states that Kant’s notion of objectivity remains “only subject in its form,” because Kant maintained that “thoughts, although they are universal and necessary determinations, are still *only our* thoughts, and are cut off from what the thing is *in-itself* by an impassable gulf” (EL 83). In contrast, Hegel claims that “the true objectivity of thinking consists in this: that thoughts are not merely our thoughts, but at the same time the *In-itself* as thought-product, the significance of what is there, as distinct from what is only thought by us, and hence still distinct from the matter itself, or from the matter *in-itself*” (EL 83). Hegel treats Kant’s subjective reconciliation of reason and aesthetics—his insistence that thought and objects must remain separated—as a failure to break from the restrictive dogma of traditional metaphysics. In contrast, he sets out to show *knowledge* of an absolute realm of being in which the opposed poles of thought and object have an underlying identity. In this sense Hegel’s account of aesthetics is based on the attempt to eradicate Kant’s representational account of cognition, proposing a conception of thought in which subject and object are one. To reconcile the Kantian dualism, Hegel requires a way to show that Kant’s regulative “as if” is in fact a constitutive principle, thereby uniting the theoretical and the aesthetic spheres in a speculative (i.e., nondiscursive) system of knowledge.

Hegel finds the resources for this task in Kant’s notion of intuitive understanding. In his discussion of the antinomy of teleological judgment in §77 of *Critique of Judgment*, Kant makes it clear that the distinguishing

feature of natural purpose concerns the “peculiarity” of human judgment: “that in cognition . . . the particular is not determined by the universal, and the latter therefore cannot be derived from the former alone” (5:406–407). Aesthetic judgment cannot derive a rational universal from a particular but merely a regulative, aesthetic universal: an aesthetic idea. But if natural purpose is only a reflective principle, an analogy derived from comparing the products of nature to our own moral purpose, then “it must be based on the idea of a possible understanding other than the human one . . . so that one could say that certain products of nature, as far as their possibility is concerned, *must*, given the particular constitution of our understanding, *be considered by us* as intentional and generated as ends” (CJ 5:406). Here Kant observes that we are only aware of the contingency of human understanding by placing it in contrast to “other possible ones,” and one other possible one in particular: the divine, intuitive intellect (*intellectus archetypus*).

In contrast to the discursive nature of human understanding, which can only experience the reconciliation of the antinomy in the feeling of the supersensible, Kant notes that intuitive understanding “goes from the *synthetically universal* (of the intuition of a whole as such) to the particular, i.e., from the whole to the parts” (CJ 5:407). As Paul Redding observes, this operation of intuitive intellect is similar to the way that we proceed from the whole to the parts in our determination of space.⁵ We do not *think* time and space, for time and space are the forms of intuition that condition the possibility of what can be thought. Unlike the understanding, which must proceed from the parts to the whole, in intuitive intellect the representation of the whole contains “no *contingency* in the combination of the parts” (CJ 5:407). There is no distinction between the theoretical and practical spheres for intuitive intellect, for all of its ideas would exist *by virtue* of having been thought. In other words, there would be no distinction between form and content, for the singular thing and the universal are inseparable. Thus understood, Kant’s account of intellectual intuition suggests that we become conscious of the limitations of our judgments of purpose at the moment we contrast them with a divine intellect. Without such a limit concept, we would confuse reflective judgments with determinant claims.

Drawing closely from §77 of *Critique of Judgment*, Hegel suggests that by introducing the notion of the intuitive intellect as a limit concept, Kant unwittingly pushes the critical project beyond the transcendental limits of the mind. If human thought can conceive of the possibility of a limit concept such as intellectual intuition, then such a limit cannot be *entirely* unknown. Building from this insight, Hegel argues that the key to reconcil-

ing the critical system lies in the proximity of human thought to intellectual intuition.⁶ While Kant maintains that we cannot think of the world “in itself,” that is, the way the world is independent of our way of seeing, it is by considering the world “as it really is” that makes human teleology a merely reflective principle. Yet if the world “as it really is”—the world as it is in the mind of God—is *unknowable*, then this must be because, as Redding explains, “reason *constitutes* the mind of God in this way *as* unknowable, not because that mind is ‘in itself’ unknowable.”⁷ Hegel saw that Kant’s recognition of the antinomy of teleological judgment returned him to the notion of intellectual intuition, the intellect for which form and content are one, not only providing a vivid depiction of the way the world might be considered as a whole, but also giving a constructive account of what the positing of the world would be like for such an understanding. While Kant held that this description remains a limiting concept, Hegel saw that by recognizing this limit human understanding can no longer constitute the world as unknowable. Rather, it recognizes its constitutive role in positing the world through reason, *including* the realm that is unknowable.⁸

It might be said that Hegel reads Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* as a philosophical tragedy, that is, as the philosophical presentation of two one-sided maxims: the maxim of the world as unknowable to human cognition and the maxim of the world as knowable for the divine intellect. These maxims cannot be reconciled by a discursive conception of reason that posits each maxim in a different realm, but by a poetic kind of reason that transcends the limits of the theoretical order. Hegel does not suggest that we must discard the cognitive limits Kant established and replace them with the productive capacity of divine intellect to form the world intuitively. Rather, he suggests that both positions must be reconciled in a larger understanding of how thought operates.⁹

To explain the importance of this enlarged account of human thought, Hegel turns to Kant’s discussion of causality in *Critique of Judgment*. He asserts that Kant’s “distinction of the purpose as *final cause* from the merely *efficient cause* (i.e., from what is usually called ‘cause’) is of the highest importance” (EL 280), for it opens the possibility of ideas creatively unfolding in lived experience. In the aesthetic sphere, appearances are grasped according to the idea that is expressed through the arrangement of their parts. While external purposiveness provides the concept of a complex system as the work of an intelligent designer (*nexus effectivus*), meaning that both ideas and forces must be imposed on matter if cognition or movement is to arise, internal purposiveness gives the concept of a system not by virtue

of an external design but of its own inner nature (*nexus finalis*). Here the parts would be means to a system's inner ends or purpose, meaning that matter is itself alive and capable of its own development without external guidance. If humans are purposive in the paradigm of final causation, then they are alive in the fullest sense of the term. For Hegel, a world of final causation contains the possibility of tragedy, for it has no external, theoretical constraints by which to adjudicate matters of conflict.

It is important to consider how far Hegel moves from Kant's version of critical philosophy by interpreting the aesthetic sphere in terms of the one sphere of human reason. Kant argued that the Ideas of reason are necessarily beyond experience.¹⁰ Thus to show how Kant's theoretical and aesthetic spheres converge, Hegel requires a new understanding of how ideas might be experienced through sensuous presentation. He finds such an account in Aristotle's notion of *nexus finalis*, reading Kant's "inner purposiveness" as "inner necessity" in order to suggest that we do not "judge" an object to be purposive by comparing it to our faculties (reflective judgment), but that the Idea itself makes a sensuous appearance in the parts of an object (knowledge). While Kant's inner purposiveness involves the mind's activity as reflective judgment searches for a concept, Hegel argues that the appearance of the Idea is nothing like cognitive awareness, that is, representation (*Vorstellung*). Rather, it is the intuitive and immediate presentation (*Darstellung*) of the Idea, just like the presentation of an artwork's inner necessity (what Hegel terms an artwork's *Selbstzweck*). Thus Hegel gives no account of aesthetic judgment, for *Darstellung* connotes a "pure" appearance where nothing is represented, meaning that nothing remains "beyond" what presents itself.¹¹ Just as the living being exhibits a perfect confluence of matter and form, so the work of art manifests its Idea in its sensuous content.¹²

In Hegel's aesthetics, the sensuous appearance of the Idea is confirmed by our experience of beauty. Kant understood beauty in terms of a symbol of the Idea, enlivening our deeper longings and opening us to the realm of the infinite, which remains indeterminate. Hegel, on the other hand, asserts that the Idea is the *self-identity* of the Concept (*Begriff*) in which the singular thing and the universal are united.¹³ Hegel's insistence on the unity of singular thing and Concept is important to note, for the critique made by the Kantian's view begins by claiming that Hegel cannot be said to respect singularity, for he reduces it to universality. For Hegel, the indeterminacy of Kant's symbol is replaced with the Idea, for in the Idea there is no "inner" or "true" meaning. Rejecting Kant's theoretical order entirely, Hegel's account of aesthetic experience entails that *nothing* remains veiled.

To see this Idea fully manifest in sensuous form is satisfying; it raises our spirits, it is beautiful. As Hegel states in *Lectures on Aesthetics*, the “beautiful is characterized as the pure appearance [*Schein*] of the Idea to sense” (111).¹⁴

By understanding beauty as the appearance of the Idea, Hegel identifies both the importance of art for the history of cognition and also the limitations of art as the bearer of truth. He illustrates this point in relation to the speculative development of Greek art. When the Idea of Greek sculpture makes its sensuous appearance, it compels the artist to represent the divinely inanimate figures with dimensions of interiority and subjectivity, giving birth to drama. In drama, and in tragedy in particular, the beautiful individualities become incarnate in living individualities. Unlike works of sculpture, tragic heroes have families and social roles. They exercise judgment that is subject to error. They display the struggles and conflicts that make up the Greek world, and in the performance of the tragedies the spectators become aware of these struggles that exist in their own selves.¹⁵ In this framework, Greek tragedy provides the transformation whereby the inner life of the Greeks, the “mores” of its ethical life, becomes a matter of thought, meaning that art as the presentation of the Idea is displaced by thought. When beauty and the Idea are united in the work of art, Hegel states that “art now transcends itself, in that it forsakes the element of a reconciled embodiment of spirit in sensuous form and passes over from the poetry of the imagination to the prose of thought” (*LA* 89).

Hegel’s argument is often referred to as the “death of art” thesis. It does not mean that artworks cease to be created but that, after tragedy, art no longer satisfies. Instead, art “invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is” (*LA* 11). When the medium of the Idea alters, Spirit takes a new shape: the form of religion, the immediate presence of the absolute. Hegel’s triad of Spiritual shapes—art, religion, and philosophy—refer to those activities that in any given historical period define the norm on the basis of which the inhabitants of that world find their way and orient themselves to it. They are immanent “transcendental” categories in the sense that they provide the condition of the possibility of the sense and significance of a world. Like art, religion is also a limited shape of Spirit, for those immersed in religious consciousness cannot grasp the limit of the absolute. Yet neither art nor religion is capable of reconciling the conflict inherent to modern life, which produces an “opposition in man which makes him into an amphibious animal, because he now has to live in two worlds which contradict one another” (*LA* 54–55). While Kant found that

philosophy could not reconcile the modern predicament, and thus turned to art, Hegel argues that art is incapable of achieving the Idea that could draw modern life into a whole.¹⁶ Instead, he claims that it is only in the medium of philosophy, which comes after art and religion, that we can fully understand ourselves.¹⁷ Thus art can no longer satisfy our desire for truth, for we are capable of *thinking* about the true character of the infinite.

Despite the limitations of art, Hegel notes that tragedy still has an important role for the speculative audience—for *us*—for it expresses the inner rationality of thought's own development. In the following section I suggest that Hegel views Greek tragedy as a disruption to inherited frameworks of ethical life that are held to be absolute. For us moderns, however, it is the *philosophy* of tragedy that disrupts the fixity that the understanding attempts to bring to the dynamic Ideas of reason, opening philosophy to a new task that is large enough to encompass the living nature of Ideas. Yet after establishing the importance of the philosophy of tragedy to returning life to the ideas, I argue that Hegel's attempt to separate philosophy's conceptual gaze from the sensuous presentation of art is not ultimately successful. His plea for a form of presentation adequate to the tensions of modern life returns our attention to the importance of tragedy understood as an immediate experience rather than a disembodied idea.

A theory of tragedy

Hegel's aesthetics allows two distinct experiences of tragedy: the original experience of tragedy for the ancient Greeks and the philosophical experience of the speculative audience whom "art invites . . . to intellectual consideration." Regarding the latter, Hegel considers tragedy to provide an alternative to the moral vision of the world posed by traditional philosophy. In the moral vision of the world, the universal remains abstract, thereby making the reconciliation of the agent and nature impossible. Hegel claims that Kant's theoretical philosophy takes this separation to its limit, for it "makes the identity of the opposites into . . . the pure boundary" (*FK* 67). For the speculative audience who remain split between the practical and theoretical spheres of existence, tragedy manifests an alternate understanding of philosophy that situates morality in the domain of society and history, thereby reconciling the amphibious condition in lived experience.

To fully appreciate Hegel's speculative account of tragedy, however, we must begin with his account of the original appearance of tragedy in ancient

Greece. Hegel's theory of tragedy aims to explain the development of a community's rational consciousness entirely within the bounds of experience. In order to explain this process, Hegel draws from Aristotle's account of tragedy in *Poetics*, which approaches tragedy as a process of learning whereby the hero gains an enlarged perspective through a process that occurs entirely within her experience. However, Aristotle states that while the "best" tragedies present the tragic effect occurring in the hero, the true tragic effect occurs in the spectators.¹⁸ Drawing from this account, Hegel identifies the task of theorizing tragedy as one of accounting for what Aristotle calls the "proper pleasure" experienced by the spectators.¹⁹ The proper pleasure of the best tragedies does not pander to the whims of the public, as do the tragedies of lesser value, but satisfy through a process of learning.

Aristotle summarizes the process of learning expressed in tragedy in terms of three moments: reversal, recognition, and catharsis. The first is reversal, which consists in a dramatic change of events. The second is recognition, whereby the hero (and the spectators with her in the "best" tragedies) comes to see that despite the fact that she acted freely, things could not have been otherwise, for the reversal of fortune was necessitated by some fallibility (*hamartia*) that lay within her from the very beginning of the drama. In this sense the spectators come to see that the hero's action is both free and necessary. The hero freely deliberated, and yet a greater end emerged through the hero's action that led to her downfall. The third element is catharsis. In Aristotle's terms, through participating in the necessary downfall of the hero, the spectators are led "to the end of pity and fear by the *katharsis* of such emotions [*pathēmaton*]."²⁰ The meaning of Aristotle's usage of *katharsis*, the "cleansing" of these *pathēmata*, is uncertain. It appears only twice in Aristotle's writings, and it is not clear whether it has a biological (a kind of relief) or a religious meaning (a kind of purification).²¹ Hegel interprets Aristotle as saying that tragedy satisfies us not through explaining why something is but through presenting the action in such a way that reconciles us to it, calming our spirits and reorienting us to the demands and challenges of practical life.²² The importance of Aristotle's theory of tragedy for Hegel is that it does not locate the suffering of the hero in an unfortunate sequence of events outside the hero's control (as an efficient cause acts upon inert matter), but as a result of the hero's own inner state (as final cause is expressed through action). The spectators are reconciled to the suffering of the hero because they discover that her suffering is not the arbitrary result of blind fate but the result of a *telos* that is internal to the form of life she inhabits.²³

The significance of Aristotle's *Poetics* in Hegel's account is that it provides an alternative to the moral view of the world. Tragedy does not present the collision of right and wrong where suffering is divinely justified, nor does it present a world of irrational contingency where suffering is purely arbitrary. Rather, it presents the unthinkable collision of right and right. The heroes "firmly identify" themselves with "one ethical 'pathos' which alone corresponds to their own already established nature," meaning that "they necessarily come into conflict with the opposite but equally justified ethical power" (*LA* 1226). By unreflectively acting according to an ethical power, the two agents bring the larger social institutions that they inhabit into view, such as the family and the state.

It is clear from this framework that Hegel has Sophocles' *Antigone* in mind.²⁴ In *Antigone*, the tragic collision arises because Creon and Antigone both act according to their social roles and commitments: Antigone has the absolute duty to perform the burial procedure for her brother, and Creon has the absolute duty to protect the city from traitors. While they are individual, free agents, their behavior also expresses the general conditions of Greek ethical life. In particular, both Antigone and Creon are bound to their ethical commitments on what the Greeks considered a "natural" basis, allowing Hegel to explain the splitting of ethical substance as a confluence of necessity (as a natural endowment) and contingency (as dependent upon a will). He states, "Nature, not the accident of circumstances or choice, assigns one sex to one law, the other to the other law; or conversely, the two ethical powers themselves give themselves an individual existence and actualise themselves in the two sexes" (*PS* 280). The female side of the collision represents family, life, and death; the particular elements of life that are prior to the social participation that the *polis* entails. Thus construed, the ethical action of women represents the citizens' existential features encompassed in their particularity. On the other hand, the male citizen represents the political and public sphere of ethical life. This involves the laws created by humans, or the universal elements of life that male citizens enter by participating in the life of the *polis*.

Hegel describes this order of ethical commitments as *Sittlichkeit*, which is usually translated as "ethical life." *Sittlichkeit* shares an etymological origin with *Sitten*, which refers to the "mores" or "customs" of a people, encompassing the sharable forms of life that lie in the language and mores of the individuals that make up a community.²⁵ In Hegel's terms, ethical life is the "immediate truth" of spirit, the relationship that the citizens have to their world without the mediation of subjective reflection (*PS* 271). It paradoxi-

cally drives agents to bring about what is, for fulfilling their obligations is what sustains them in being. In this sense, Hegel's notion of ethical life provides a way of locating the ontological structure of thought in substantial life, thus identifying an imminent conception of reason that restores content to Kant's abstract metaphysics. This is how the speculative experience of tragedy affects the modern audience: it reconciles the Kantian dualism of morality and nature, for in ethical life there is no gap between what ought to be and what is.²⁶ In opposition to *Sittlichkeit*, Hegel uses the word *Moralität* to refer to an abstract conception of morality that is separate from aesthetic culture, for it sets an obligation to realize what does not yet exist. Hegel's major issue with the Kantian infinite is that it necessitates the dualism between the theoretical and practical spheres—it fixes the amphibious position of the modern subject in stone—meaning that morality never becomes substantial but continually condemns the social order of finitude. As Williams notes, Kantian subjectivity finds itself “burdened with an absolute barrier that cannot be crossed,” becoming the locus of an irreconcilable antinomy.²⁷

Hegel's notion of *Sittlichkeit* confronts Kant's theoretical conception of morality. If we understand tragedy in terms of ethical life, the heroes do not “choose” a course of action as autonomous individuals, or to put it in Kantian terms, practical reason does not legislate their material impulses.²⁸ Indeed, an antinomy between two Kantian moral agents is unthinkable. On the contrary, Hegel's theory of agency rejects the “inner-outer” distinction where an inner state causes an outer bodily reaction in the technical framework of cause and effect.²⁹ The heroes act according to an immediate ethical commitment, meaning that each has justification, and yet each is one-sided:

The original essence of tragedy consists . . . in the fact that within such a conflict each of the opposed sides, if taken by itself, has justification; while each can establish the true and positive content of its own aim and character only by denying and infringing the equally justified power of the other. The consequence is that in its ethical life, and because of it, each is nevertheless involved in *guilt* [*Schuld*]. (LA 1196)

Hegel states that it is “because of” ethical life that the heroes become guilty. This is to say that tragic guilt does not come from doing what is wrong but from doing what is right. Moreover, it comes from doing what is right and therefore infringing on an opposed right. While Kantian *Moralität* stresses the inner will and intention of the agent, meaning that agents are

guilty to the extent that they violate a moral law, the tragic agent is deemed guilty regardless of his knowledge or intentions. There is no struggle in the Kantian moral universe other than the tension between practical reason and one's inclinations. The tragic universe, on the other hand, is one in which the deep ethical commitments of a society can lead its citizens to be both right and wrong at the same moment.

Building on Aristotle's conception of tragedy, Hegel argues that the collision of ethical powers is fated from the outset. This fate is not external to the form of life, acting upon it in the framework of efficient causation. Rather, it is internal, springing from an inner purpose. In Hegel's terms, what appears as "blind fate" or "dreadful fate" for the hero is, from the vantage of the spectators, a "rational fate" that unfolds according to a proper principle (*PS* 278). Thus he concludes that Spirit—the collective consciousness of the whole—does not develop arbitrarily or in the paradigm of "might is right."³⁰ Rather, Spirit is "consciousness that *has Reason*" (*PS* 265). It is not simply a shape of Spirit where reason comes to be used instrumentally, as in Kant's moral subject. It is a shape in which the ethical life, the immediate commitments to which each subject is bound, is shaped and determined by a rational process that is expressed in experience. It is because of this rationality that we are reconciled to the tragic events that occur. We recognize that we have witnessed "eternal justice which, as the absolute power of fate, saves and maintains the harmony of the substance of the ethical order against the particular powers which were becoming independent and therefore colliding, and because of the inner rationality of its sway we are satisfied when we see individuals coming to ruin" (*LA* 1230). Reconciliation marks the end of tragedy, for the spectators no longer have an immediate relation to ethical life. Instead, they gain a reflective, mediated relation to their environs. What was disharmonious is brought into harmony through the "inner rationality" exhibited in the tragic effect, the proper pleasure of tragedy. This harmony is not reflective but immediate, for it takes the form of the sensuous presentation of the Idea. Hegel claims to lay bare what is satisfying about the tragic effect by understanding it in terms of the satisfaction of reason.

Interpreting Hegel

Hegel's theory of tragedy provides an account of the speculative power of thought to reconcile reason with ethical life. This account involves two elements: the power of Greek tragedy to overcome the shape of Spirit that

is bound to an immediate attachment to ethical life, and the power of the speculative experience of tragedy to overcome the Kantian dualism between sense and reason in an enlarged account of philosophy. Yet does Hegel's theory of tragedy advance Kantian aesthetics? This question is the battlefield over which Hegel scholarship is fought. For proponents of the Kantian's view, Hegel's notion of tragic reconciliation as "eternal justice" not only constitutes a denial of Kant but also a denial of tragedy, for it attempts to remove contingency from ethical life. In his essay "Hegel's Theory of Tragedy" (1909), A. C. Bradley famously attacks Hegel's notion of reconciliation. He argues that "even if we felt that the catastrophe was by a rational necessity involved in the divine and accomplished purpose of the world," we should be morally outraged by it.³¹ Hegel's notion of reconciliation displays a naive "enthusiasm for the affirmative," rushing over the tragic conflict in order to find a transcendent meaning that could render tragic suffering meaningful.³² Bradley concludes that Hegel oversteps the limits of critical philosophy by positing a totalizing metaphysics that claims to reveal a trajectory within ethical life that moves toward greater unity. Like Antigone, the agents of history are unfortunate casualties in the development of Spirit toward greater synthesis. Thus the "wounds of the *Spirit* heal" (*PS* 407) at the expense of Antigone's cave of sorrows.

Building on Bradley's critique, Sebastian Gardner argues that Hegel can only maintain the connection between tragedy and ethical development "by stepping outside the experience of tragic art so as to view the perspective of tragedy as merely partial."³³ By theorizing the "finality" of tragedy as a reconciliation—as something that lies beyond tragic presentation—Gardner argues that Hegel denies the singularity of tragic suffering. This is "to break faith with the experience of tragedy, to fail to give it its due." Like Bradley, Gardner views tragic suffering as dysteleological, a monstrous, singular moment of pain that confronts the search for a *telos* or necessity that would render it meaningful. For Kant, the monstrous is a magnitude of experience that surpasses the sublime, for its greatness "annihilates the end [*Zweck*] which its concept constitutes" (*CJ* 5:253). Thus it destroys any return to teleological sensibility. The Kantian's view concludes that Hegel dismisses Kant's critical move and returns to a dogmatic kind of metaphysics that justifies the necessity of suffering in the development of reason. Suffering becomes mere appearance and the development of Spirit the deeper reality, thus bringing in the old dualism via the back door.

The metaphysical realist's view, on the other hand, begins by defending Hegel against the attacks made by the Kantian's view, suggesting that the portrayal of Hegel's theory of tragedy as a return to precritical metaphysics

is a caricature of his system. In contrast, it seeks to show that Hegel does not depart from Kant's critical project but aims to correct it. For example, Williams argues that Hegel's notion of reconciliation is only a return to dogmatic metaphysics if we read him through "the Kantian frame."³⁴ By remaining committed to Kant's critique of metaphysics, Kantians such as Bradley and Gardner fail to see that Hegel aims to move beyond the problematic borders of Kant's theoretical philosophy, not his critical philosophy *per se*. For instance, Bradley can only argue that Hegel oversteps critical philosophy by remaining committed to the Kantian dualism, leaving the "prejudices of ordinary modes of cognition totally uncontested."³⁵ Williams argues that Bradley fails to identify exactly what kind of reason he uses to call Hegel to account, and thus what standard he uses to argue that Hegel's system deserves our moral outrage. By interpreting tragic suffering as morally outrageous, Bradley relies on an unacknowledged system of *Moralität* that is autonomous from ethical life, thus reproducing the moral dualism in question. He disregards Hegel's understanding of reason as an inner purpose in order to accuse him of transposing an infinite notion of rationality onto the dynamics of history, presuming a view of tragedy as the presentation of irresolvable contradiction. Williams concludes that if Hegel's philosophy departs from Kant, it cannot be a return to a pre-critical understanding of reason as impassable, theoretical power. Instead, it puts forward a view of reason as something that is manifest within the alteration of history. What Williams ultimately shows is that Hegel does not *intend* to break from Kant but to advance his revolution against (traditional) metaphysics. Kant denies that we can have the kinds of knowledge to which pre-critical metaphysics aspires, and Hegel agrees. Kant advances a conception of freedom in terms of self-determination, and Hegel agrees. It is only then that Hegel goes beyond Kant, for he finds it necessary to alter the frame of Kant's critical project in order to advance the critique of metaphysics.

Houlgate concurs with Williams, arguing that it is Hegel's attempt to advance Kant's critique of metaphysics that leads him to provide a new ontology. This new ontology provides an "alternative to Kant's 'Metaphysical Deduction' in the *Critique of Pure Reason*," restoring content to metaphysical claims in the face of Kant's critique.³⁶ In the metaphysical deduction, Kant identifies the concepts of the understanding from the logical forms of judgment, arguing that these concepts are "pure" (i.e., without content), thereby rendering them separate from the content that is judged. For Hegel, Kant's deduction holds the concepts of the understanding on the opposite side of an impassable chasm that separates them from our experience of nature, thus

preserving the metaphysical dualism between concept and object despite his regulative notion of aesthetic judgment. The upshot of Houlgate's argument is that Hegel can only advance the critique of metaphysics by establishing that "concept," "judgment," and "syllogism" do not simply name logical structures, as they do for Kant, but "structures in nature, and so in *being itself*," not just forms of human understanding and reason."³⁷ It is only by restoring content to the concepts, which is seen most clearly in the notion of art as the sensuous appearance of the Idea, that the critical project can overcome traditional metaphysics.

The metaphysical realist's view put forward by Williams and Houlgate diagnoses Kant's separation of abstract morality and material life in terms of a tragic dualism, identifying the only solution as Hegel's speculative reading of history in terms of ontology. Hegel's account of speculative thinking considers world history as a tragic drama that transposes Kant's theoretical court of reason to the practical court of world judgment:

World history is this divine tragedy, where spirit rises up above pity, ethical life, and everything that in other spheres is sacred to it. . . . But what has been laid low, *has* been laid low and *had* to be laid low. World spirit is unsparing and pitiless. . . . Nothing profounder can be said than Schiller's words, "World history is a court of world judgment." No people ever suffered wrong; what it suffered, it had merited. The court of world judgment is not to be viewed as the mere might of spirit. . . . World history, on the other hand, is always on the advance to something higher.³⁸

Because art is not free but expressive of the ethical mores of a community, Hegel argues that tragedy is an art form akin to life, to the *telos* of human history. It displaces the fixity of moral absolutes that furnish the Kantian court of reason and frames spiritual life in such a way that enables us to reconcile what has been "laid low" into criteria that can be used for judgment. Philosophy, following the intuitive medium of tragic presentation, turns to historical events as aesthetic phenomena. Historical events are seen to manifest beautiful form, thereby giving a sensuous presentation of the Idea. In the same way that tragedy reconciles us to the heroes' suffering, philosophy reconciles us to historical suffering, rendering us morally at peace with what unfolds.

Hegel's philosophy sets a challenging puzzle. If we criticize the development of history, then it seems that we reproduce the tragedy of traditional

philosophy by considering reason as an impassable power. Yet as Robert Bernasconi argues, to claim the identity between philosophy and history seems to produce a new kind of tragedy, one in which *philosophy* transgresses its limits. Bernasconi draws our attention to Hegel's words that follow from the preceding passage. Here Hegel asserts that it is "the right of world spirit" to trample the peoples who do not bear the work of Spirit under foot, for "the absolute idea of spirit has absolute right against anything else."³⁹ For Bernasconi, to claim that "no people ever suffered wrong" and that suffering is "deserved" expresses a philosophical kind of tragedy, for it reveals Hegel's commitment to a moral view of the world where the good (in the form of the rational) is rewarded and the bad (in the form of the irrational) is punished.⁴⁰ Thus Hegel can say that "as grievous as it may be to watch [Spirit] trample [the rights of non-Spirit-bearing peoples] under foot," we can be reconciled to this fate because it is "rational."⁴¹ Bernasconi concludes that Hegel's theory is "anti-tragic," for it steps out of the tragic cry of injustice in order to suggest that *all* suffering comes from a rational error. It claims that Spirit, the shape of consciousness that has reason, can redeem the incalculable volume of human suffering in history.

For Williams, Bernasconi's critique fails to consider Hegel's theory of tragedy on its own terms. Bernasconi's charge only has force "if one presupposes the moral vision of the world," that is, if one is already committed to the tragic dualism between abstract morality and material life.⁴² What Williams wants to show is that Bernasconi fails to note that the tragedies do not present suffering that is irrational. Rather, they present situations that could have been otherwise had the hero recognized her fallibility, yielded, and recognized the legitimacy of the opposed ethical power. This is a valid point and corrects the tendency of the Kantian's reading of Hegel to deny the Aristotelian element of tragedy whereby the heroes come to discover, through suffering, an error that lay within their understanding. Through drawing our attention to the fact that Hegel's theory of tragedy powerfully illuminates many of the tragedies that present suffering as the result of human error, as well as many events in history that can be understood through the reversal-recognition dynamic, Williams aims to defend Hegel by appealing to "Hegel's tragic view of world history that is plainly evident in the text."⁴³ The rise of Spirit to a higher stage is not only an advance, he claims, but is also tragic. Thus Hegel's reading of history does not endorse the cynical view that might makes right, that is, that whatever prevails is right. Williams claims that Hegel is only committed to the view that the "judgment of history is rational *to the extent that* it preserves and upholds right."⁴⁴

While Williams is correct to note that many of the tragedies *do* present suffering that is rational to the extent that the hero's fall is internal to his or her own being, he fails to note that Bernasconi's attack is not so much against Hegel's reading of tragedy as it is about the identity he posits between philosophy and history. While Bernasconi aims his critique at Hegel's reading of tragedy, he ultimately questions whether one can move from aesthetic theory to history in order to claim that *all* suffering is deserved without forcing a theory of tragedy onto historical events with considerable violence. For Bernasconi, the claim that *some* events in history are analogous to tragedy might have some validity, but to claim that *all* suffering is deserved is to claim that the philosophy of tragedy is adequate to history. Hegel must claim that his theory is adequate to history, for it is only by such a theory that "the necessity of what happens to the individuals appear as absolute rationality, and only then can our hearts be morally at peace: shattered by the fate of the heroes but reconciled fundamentally" (LA 1215). By grasping the absolute rationality of world history, Hegel argues that philosophy can turn everything from the fall of Greece to the failure of the French Revolution into an aesthetic phenomenon that constitutes a moment in the development of Spirit toward greater self-awareness. The task of philosophy is to survey history in such a way as to reconcile us to the suffering we find, thereby allowing our hearts to be morally at peace.⁴⁵

Bernasconi's critique of Hegel confronts Williams' reading with the following problem. If some suffering proves to be irrational, if some historical events resist his theory and frustrate our desire for moral peace, then Hegel's system cannot be adequate to its Idea. For Williams, examples of dysteleological suffering are not a problem for Hegel because his "metaphor of the slaughterhouse expresses the irrationality of radical evil."⁴⁶ Hegel's argument is that in the irrational slaughterhouse of history, Spirit emerges as consciousness that has reason, that is, as consciousness that can call slaughter to account. Yet Williams' concession faces a particular difficulty. If Hegel's theory of tragedy were to admit the irrationality of *some* suffering, then our hearts would not be restored to moral peace, that is, not unless we were to calculate suffering to be *worth* the rational benefits. If some events cannot be contained by Hegel's systematic attempt to describe the rationality of history, then we cannot say that his theory of tragedy is adequate to its object. Instead, his theory would describe some events wherein historical development mirrored the logic of tragic art, just as his theory of tragedy might be said to describe some tragedies that manifest the reversal-recognition structure. If Hegel's theory cannot exhaust all cases,

then it would not stand the resistance that alternate conceptions of historical development might pose to his own narrative. In the following section I consider one such narrative in the work of Walter Benjamin. I argue that Hegel's theory is unable to resist Benjamin's narrative of history, meaning that the identity he claims between his system and history cannot be considered absolute.

Tragedy and history

In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928), Benjamin provides an alternative post-Kantian tradition to Hegel's dialectic, showing that Hegel's desire to escape the representational paradigm of aesthetics—a desire that we will see is shared by Nietzsche and Heidegger—subjects his project to the philosophical tragedy identified by Bernasconi. Benjamin's interpretation of tragedy does not fit easily with either the Kantian's or the metaphysical realist's view, for it commends Hegel's critique of Kant's false infinite and yet seeks to retain Kant's representational understanding of cognition. From this position, Benjamin's reflections on tragedy reveal that Hegel's understanding of aesthetics provides a problematic conception of the Idea, leading us to reconsider the representational paradigm of aesthetics rejected by his system.⁴⁷

The Origin of German Tragic Drama begins with a dense and complex prologue that attacks the doctrine that art can be understood as the presentation of an Idea in sensuous form. Benjamin argues that Hegel's attempt to identify a pure concept of tragedy reveals an artificial, rule-based theory of genre that misunderstands the nature of genre categories. In his view, tragedy is neither prescriptive nor empirically comprehensive. Rather, like any genre it is introduced by a "significant work" that violates the limits of a previous mode of presentation. To explain this concept of violation Benjamin introduces the notion of origin (*Ursprung*) to describe the work of a transgressive piece of art that becomes a norm. He states that origin is a historical category and yet has "nothing to do with genesis [*Entstehung*]" (*GT* 45). In other words, it is not used to describe "the process by which the existent came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance" (*GT* 45). Origin does not present an Idea that is available for thought but is rather "an eddy in the stream of becoming," swallowing "the material involved in the process of genesis." That which is original is never the manifest existence of the factual, for its movement is only apparent to a dual insight. From one view,

“it needs to be recognised as a process of restoration and reestablishment.” From the other view, it needs to be recognized as “something imperfect and incomplete.” When seen in this double way, what takes place in every original phenomenon is “a determination of the form in which an idea will constantly confront the historical world, until it is revealed fulfilled [*sic*], in the totality of its history” (*GT* 45–46). Benjamin seeks to show us that despite Hegel’s systematic attempt to grasp the meaning of art in the context of modernity, the artwork remains what it was for the ancients: pure individuality. Hegel’s conviction that philosophy is able to uncover the laws that govern historical genres presumes a model of history as a dichotomic continuum, thus rejecting the idea that all accounts of history, due to the radical singularity of historical events, are the object of construction.⁴⁸

Benjamin’s critique of Hegel revitalizes Kant’s account of aesthetics, which posits that all aesthetic events are underdetermined and thus unknowable. Considering the artwork as pure individuality means that it maintains a totality that resists synthesis into a greater movement of history, thus preserving its ability to “constantly confront the historical world” (*GT* 45). Artworks *constantly* confront the historical world, for they cannot be turned into knowledge. To elucidate the autonomy of art, Benjamin rejects Kant’s notion of the symbol, for it might be employed as an underdetermined alternative to the Hegelian Idea. It is vital to note that Benjamin does not reject Kant’s notion of symbol because he deems it to be incorrect. Rather, he is deeply concerned with the way that romantic philosophers—including Hegel—employed Kant’s notion of symbol to overshadow his immensely important notion of the aesthetic idea. Benjamin states that the romantic “notion of the symbol . . . has nothing more than the name in common with the genuine notion” (*GT* 159), for it “insists on an invisible unity of form and content” (*GT* 160). While this understanding of the symbol provides the romantic with an “immeasurably comforting effect,” it ends up serving as “the philosophical extenuation of that impotence which . . . fails to do justice to content in formal analysis and to form in the aesthetics of content” (*GT* 160). Benjamin’s skepticism of the notion of symbol confronts Hegel’s notion of beauty as the sensuous appearance of the Idea. The concept of the symbol is “abused,” he argues, “whenever in the work of art the ‘manifestation’ of an ‘idea’ is declared a symbol” (*GT* 160). Rather than unsettling us by alerting us to the abyss between sign and signified, opening our vision to transgressive creativity, the symbol is posited as the anticipation of freedom, for it is deemed to contain a *telos* of semiotic identity with its sign. Benjamin argues that when such a relation is declared, the unity

of the material and transcendental object is “distorted into a relationship between appearance and essence” (*GT* 160), for nothing remains beyond the particularity of the artwork.

Benjamin puts forward an alternative to the notion of symbol in his notion of “the speculative counterpart” (*GT* 161) of symbol: allegory. This analysis of the symbol in terms of allegory is important to the overall reading of Kant developed in this book, for it identifies an allegorical element—or perhaps we might even say a “tragic” element—in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. To examine the symbol in terms of allegory, Benjamin considers modern forms of tragedy. In particular, he turns to seventeenth-century tragedy (*Trauerspiel*) that confronts the nineteenth-century romantic understanding of symbol, as Eagleton explains, with a “profound gulf between materiality and meaning,” a gulf across which a connection between the two persists in an underdetermined fashion.⁴⁹ The seventeenth century was preoccupied with allegory, which is a profoundly visual form. Yet what comes to appearance in the allegory is nothing visual but the materiality of allegory itself. In John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, for example, we find a break between nature and meaning, for the plot of history is reduced to signs and fragments in need of deciphering. The breach between nature and meaning, between sign and signifier, is felt intensely in the withdrawal of God’s immediate presence. Milton’s endeavor to “justify the ways of God to men” requires an awkward and discursive style in order to bridge that abyss.⁵⁰ From God’s point of view, God’s acts in creation are purely symbolic, possessed of immediate meaning, while from the point of view of the fallen creation those acts must be decoded and reassembled in a narrative form that lays bare its own devices.

Benjamin argues that allegory confronts Hegel’s romantic attempt to remove the abyss between sign and signifier to the extent that it is self-aware of its representational character as art. In this sense allegory does not depart from Kant’s notion of the symbol. Rather, it assists us to reclaim the Kantian symbol from the romantics. Furthermore, allegory does not anticipate Kant’s practical/theoretical dualism, for it first developed in classicism as a “dark background against which the symbol might stand out” (*GT* 165). While symbol relates to “being,” acting as a “sign for ideas, which is self-contained, concentrated,” allegory relates to “sign,” acting as a “successively progressing, dramatically mobile, dynamic representation of ideas which has acquired the very fluidity of time” (*GT* 165). In other words, when we understand the artwork in terms of Being, it is limited to a determinate meaning that we must recognize. The notion of allegory, on the other hand, opens an underdetermined meaning, thereby rendering the meaning-making process

as historical *praxis* itself. This is to say that what appears in the form of pain and destruction is, in the romanticized symbol, idealized, meaning that “the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption.” In “the context of allegory,” on the other hand, “the image is only a signature, only the monogram of essence, not the essence itself in a mask.”

Benjamin’s insistence on the ability of allegory to retain the suffering and pain of history confronts the romantic understanding of the symbol to occlude the underside of history beneath the idea of rational progress. While symbol transfigures the “face of nature” in idealized form, allegory confronts us with a very different face: “the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape” (*GT* 166). The *facies hippocratica*, the “Hippocratic face,” is the change produced in the face by impending death.⁵¹ Thus allegory is *facies hippocratica* because it “corresponds to the ancient gods in the deadness of its concrete materiality” (*GT* 224). It is the “‘vaporisation’ . . . of theological essences” and “an appreciation of the transience of things,” encompassing a mode of thinking that establishes itself where “transitoriness and eternity confronted each other most closely” (*GT* 223–224). Allegory emerges in the in-between space left after the gods have departed, but their presence remains a distinct memory corresponding “to the ancient gods in the deadness of its concrete tangibility” (*GT* 226). Like the Kantian symbol, which opens us to long for the presence of the good and yet refuses us schematic access, allegory is a sign that throws us back onto the materiality of signification, both “convention *and* expression,” maintaining the transgressive dimension of Kant’s aesthetic ideas that confronts its audience with the task of thinking more than exists in the sign (*GT* 175). The disruptive character of allegory expressed in *Trauerspiel* manifests a negative kind of dialectic that confronts Hegel’s notion of rational development, for it entails that philosophy, when it breaks from the illumination of allegory, does not lead to a higher form of presentation but regresses to a new form of myth. Thus in modernity it is not speculative philosophy but a kind of philosophy attuned to the immediate, confronting experience of art that encapsulates the kind of thinking capable of navigating God’s withdrawal.

The importance of Benjamin’s understanding of *Trauerspiel* lies in the way that it recasts the romantic understanding of the symbol in terms of allegory, thus pointing to a new way of understanding the importance of Greek tragedy to philosophy. Like *Trauerspiel*, tragedy does not give “an immeasurably comforting effect” but confronts us with a “dramatically mobile” idea that transforms our understanding of history (*GT* 109). Indeed, Benjamin rejects the notion that tragedy turns on a specific “idea”

at all. Tragedy confronts symbol with the allegorical in the presentation of the hero's silence. The hero's silence is the defining feature of tragedy, for in remaining silent the hero refuses to grant to any available words the capacity to synthesize her experience. We think of Antigone's entombment or Prometheus' eternal torment; the hero "does not look for justification and therefore throws suspicion back on his persecutors" (*GT* 109), transforming Creon into a tyrant and Zeus into a monster. If the hero were to defend herself against the logic of her oppressor, she would have to employ the use of signs that depend on the oppressor's claim to power, rendering her suffering as a necessary component in the development of some inner rationality. The hero knows that her suffering is unjust and is thus struck dumb. She is, like Prometheus, *pro-manthano*, "knowing in advance," seeing the nullity of the established moral order and thus finding no language within it commensurate to her knowledge.⁵² The lack of a language capable of expressing her innocence means that her defense cannot be articulated. She finds herself ethically in advance of the new gods who ground the political order but also beyond the gods of the ancient, ethical order.

By locating the significance of tragedy in its singularity, Benjamin suggests that it is not the reversal-recognition structure but "the paradox of the birth of genius and moral speechlessness" that constitutes the "sublime" element of tragedy (*GT* 109). Yet unlike the Kantian sublime, "there is no question of the reinstitution of the moralized universe" after the suffering of the hero. Our hearts are not restored to moral peace, for we find ourselves in a moment of clarity between two kinds of myth that would occlude the innocence of the hero by ascribing to her some form of rational or metaphysical guilt. We are confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of the gods, and history is transformed from an eschatological movement toward greater freedom into a "petrified, primordial landscape" (*GT* 27) strewn with the bodies of untold victims. Beautiful art in the form of allegory "declares itself to be beyond beauty. Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things" (*GT* 178).

Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* undermines Hegel's argument that all suffering is deserved by providing an alternative reading of both tragedy and history. Unlike the Kantian's view, Benjamin does not reject Hegel's reading of tragedy in terms of history, for history, he claims, is the "integral truth of tragedy" (*GT* 105). Yet his understanding of history as the truth of tragedy is nothing like Hegel's narrative of historical progression. Rather, while epic poetry constitutes the unmediated presentation of tradition, tragedy entails "a tremendous re-shaping of tradition"

(*GT* 106), opening tradition to the possibility of creative transformation. This transition does not anticipate a higher, conceptual grasp of traditional ideas but a clearing between two forms of myth: the daimonic and the philosophical.⁵³ Benjamin argues that Hegel's philosophy assumes "the form of doctrine" (*GT* 27), for it is closed to counter readings of history. The ideal of theoretical necessity demonstrates that "the total elimination of representation—which is boasted by every proper didactic system—is the sign of genuine knowledge," thereby renouncing "that area of truth towards which language is directed" (*GT* 27). Hegel's system does not simply illuminate the world but also encloses it in a reductive myth in which everything inarticulate can be exhausted by language. In such a system, representation is a digression that must be surpassed for being itself, and the method of philosophy must take on an "uninterrupted purposeful structure" (*GT* 28).

Benjamin's account of tragedy demonstrates the importance of maintaining Kant's representational account of art. It shows that tragedy cannot be understood as a presentation of the Idea that anticipates the representational activities of religion and philosophy, for tragedy *is* representational. It is an interruption to seamless reasoning, illuminating the world by representing a language that is unrepresentable. For Benjamin, Hegel was wrong to think that Kant failed to overcome representational aesthetics. He argues instead that Kant intentionally retained a representational conception of thought in order to maintain a grammar capable of resisting the human tendency to confuse the subjective conditions of thought with reality. To reopen this grammar Benjamin does not return to Kant's dualist metaphysics where representation is a subjective image of the real object. Instead, he recognizes that one need not hold on to the Kantian dualism to maintain Kant's emphasis on representation. As representation, art has a synthetic dimension but not the kind of absolute synthesis we find in Hegel. It is an intermediate stage between the daimonic and the philosophic. In this historical framework, art does not anticipate the systematicity of philosophy but maintains the open-endedness of Kant's aesthetic idea. Thus it can still confront us today. The task of philosophy that recognizes the representational character of art is to outline a procedure that does not regress into the daimonic or transform into the philosophic but that authentically engages with the recalcitrant particularity of sensuous experience. In this sense Benjamin does not provide an alternative "narrative" of history to Hegel but an alternative "poetics" of history; he problematizes the very attempt to narrate history, thus cleaving open the present to uncharted possibilities.

Benjamin's critique of Hegel's notion of the Idea does not aim to address every part of Hegel's oeuvre but to expose the danger of Hegel's position. This is important to note, for the metaphysical realist's view has a response to the charge that Hegel dismisses singularity in favor of the Idea. In *Science of Logic*, for example, while Hegel states that the singular thing and the universal are united in the Idea, he also insists that they maintain their independence from one another.⁵⁴ In the most advanced kind of judgments, judgments of the concept, the singular thing is external to the universal but not external to the Idea. According to Paul Redding, such judgments "can be thought of as somehow being directed to some object as having the degree of independence from the universal characteristic of the singular: qua singular, the thing is not just an exemplification of its kind."⁵⁵ Redding suggests that it is precisely because of Hegel's insistence of the independence of the singular that the universal can be said to be adequate to the singular thing, while the singular thing can be said to be external and contingent. This entails that while one telling of history might be adequate to the events, it is always the case that, due to the singular nature of these events, *another* proposed history of these events is possible. Singularity would be preserved, with the added advantage of not creating an impassable gulf between thought and world.⁵⁶

While this defense shows that Hegel gives room for the independence of the singular, for it makes room for alternative narratives, it does not address Benjamin's critique of narrating history. Benjamin does not so much propose an alternate narrative of history as an alternate *conception* of history that is sensitive to the irreducibility of historical events to narratives as such. Hegel's response to the tragedy of philosophy, understood as the inevitable failure of forms of judgment that neglect the singular, is to reconcile the two sides of the impassable gulf between thought and world, meaning that the singular must be brought together with the universal under the Idea. While there might be room for the independence of the singular (such as a historical event), it remains inseparable from the Idea until an alternative Idea is found.

Benjamin argues that this approach is highly dangerous, for it is premised on a view of singularity that remains subject to thought. Moreover, it entails a conservative understanding of philosophy that is concerned with the coherence of the singular in regard to its historical relation to other singulars, albeit in a way that respects the independence of singularity. Thus it lacks a robust notion of creativity where the singularity of a historical event or a work of art exhausts the thinkable and remains an underdetermined representation that is capable of confronting us in the present. For

Benjamin, responding to the tragedy of philosophy does not require a way of thinking that overcomes the abyss between thought and world but one that recognizes the danger involved in systematic thought. Singularity is to be privileged *at the expense of* the Idea, providing an ineliminable rupture in all systematic thinking in such a way that breaks open historical narratives to reveal an uncharted future.

The advantage of Benjamin's proposal is that it does not frame the task of responding to the tragedy of philosophy as a matter of healing the philosophical project, which would cast the solution to the problematic of tragedy in terms of philosophy. Rather, it frames the task of philosophy as a matter of providing a way of thinking that remains in the tragic experience, that cleaves open the historical realm to *praxis* understood as the creation of ends. Benjamin holds that all language, and all art, remains representation. He argues that the task of representation is not, as is often thought, to refer to some primordial object that solidifies the impassable gulf between sign and symbolized. Rather, the task of representation is to return us "in a roundabout way to its original object" (*GT* 28–29), that is, to truth: "Truth, bodied forth in the dance of represented ideas, resists being projected, by whatever means, into the realm of knowledge [that is] possession" (*GT* 29).

Benjamin agrees with Hegel to the extent that art represents truth. However, he does not hold that truth can be projected into knowledge, that is, into a kind of knowledge that claims adequacy to its object. Rather, he poses an alternative reading of Kant's account of art history, proposing that tragedy displaces us from the possession of truth by revealing the allegorical nature of representation. Kant's aesthetic judgment provides an alternative conception of this task to Hegel's speculative reason, for it treats the singular as an end in itself. The artwork is a singular locus of meaning that is not reducible to a concept. The task of philosophy is to outline a procedure of thinking that is capable of attending to the singular as a unique happening, something that is not reducible to universals that would situate the particularity of the event within a larger vision of a historical process.

Benjamin's return to Kant's representational account of art highlights that in the aesthetic domain our thought cannot be understood as identical to Being. In the following chapters I suggest that Benjamin's critique of Hegel assists us to diagnose a similar attempt in Nietzsche and Heidegger to overcome the representational paradigm of aesthetics. Benjamin gives us reason to consider that the task of philosophy is not to overcome representation but to recognize the inherent risk of philosophical thinking. Such

philosophy cannot reconcile the philosopher to the suffering of history but rather attempts to learn from tragedy by outlining a collective project of sense making. Such a project has no guarantee of success, no protection from future tragedy, and no capacity to redeem past moments of cultural shipwreck. Rather, it acknowledges the task of thinking and acting in a world ceaselessly vulnerable, and free.

Nietzsche

Tragic Philosophy

Saying yes to life even in its strangest and harshest problems . . . that is . . . the key to the concept of tragic feeling.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche argues that Kant’s “monstrous courage and wisdom” revealed the subjective interest “concealed at the essence of logic” (112).¹ While traditional philosophy privileged the transcendental over the aesthetic, the fixed and eternal over an alterable process of becoming, Kant sealed the limits of thought once and for all by showing the transcendental order to be beyond human reach. Nietzsche defines the Kantian settlement in epochal terms, suggesting that after Kant “a culture is inaugurated that I venture to call a tragic culture” (*BT* 112). By describing post-Kantian culture as “tragic,” Nietzsche identifies something essential to tragedy transcending the drama of the ancient Greeks and reborn in Kant’s discovery of philosophy’s farther edge. Yet Nietzsche also saw that Kant ultimately hindered this discovery, for his desire to maintain the moral intelligibility of human life led him to preserve the existence of a moral order of value as a postulate of reason. Thus Kant inaugurates a tragic culture yet cannot provide that culture’s emblematic figure. Nietzsche identifies another figure who could lead the people beyond Kant, one able to penetrate the vacuity of moral sentiment to an aesthetic kind of value: Richard Wagner.

Nietzsche proposes the rebirth of a tragic culture in response to the failure of philosophy to acknowledge and affirm life without positing a principle of sufficient reason that would render every event as a meaningful part of a total system. While this proposal resonates with the problematic

of tragedy we find in Kant and Hegel, in Nietzsche we see the bifurcation of this problematic in his identification of tragedy as an epochal moment wherein the dissonant forces of human life eclipse philosophy. Pace Kant, Nietzsche's response to the tragedy of philosophy is not concerned with providing a rational way of thinking capable of navigating the fluidity of the aesthetic sphere. Rather, it is concerned with outlining a *tragic philosophy*, a philosophy that announces the nullity of the rational sphere and celebrates the triumph of the aesthetic. While such a proposal resonates with Hegel's critique of Kant's moral philosophy, Nietzsche rejects Hegel's interpretation of tragedy as an expression of a community's ethical life. Instead, he proposes that art is free and unfettered from ethical concerns. In the preface to the second edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* entitled "Attempt at Self-Criticism," Nietzsche states that *The Birth of Tragedy* was the first time that he put forward a position that went "beyond good and evil," a philosophy that "dares to move, to demote, morality into the realm of appearance" (22). He claims that *The Birth of Tragedy* diagnoses morality as "a will to negate life," a "secret instinct of annihilation" that must banish the ugly and painful parts of existence (23). In contrast to morality, tragedy issues a purely aesthetic redemption, teaching us "the art of *this-worldly* comfort" (26).

In this chapter I examine Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* in order to identify the challenge his understanding of tragedy poses to the interpretation of tragedy put forward in this book. While I will draw from other parts of Nietzsche's philosophy that develop the themes of *The Birth of Tragedy*, I limit my analysis to this text for two reasons. The first is that it is Nietzsche's most sustained treatment of tragedy. While tragedy remains a theme throughout his entire intellectual development, nowhere else does he give such a prolonged reflection on the implications of tragedy for philosophy. The second is that Nietzsche continually returns to *The Birth of Tragedy* throughout his work. Even when he reflects on his first major work fifteen years later in "Attempt at Self-Criticism," describing it as an "impossible," "badly written," and "embarrassing" text, he declares it to be a "*proven* book" that satisfied "the best minds of the time."²

Nietzsche's reflections in "Attempt at Self-Criticism" raise the problem of how the original argument in *The Birth of Tragedy* is best understood. While he informs us that he rejects Schopenhauer's "resignationism" (*BT* 24) and proposes the affirmation of life we find in his later work, it is not clear whether his arguments in the original text live up to this later claim. The question I will pose to *The Birth of Tragedy* in this chapter is whether Nietzsche's understanding of tragedy truly enables us to affirm life

as a whole, or whether it is in fact a covert denial of life. This question is significant to the broader argument in this book, for both Nietzsche's proposal of a tragic philosophy and Kant's enlarged way of thinking claim to affirm the dimensions of life excluded from the scope of any form of philosophy that seeks to determine all knowledge in the paradigm of *techné*. If Nietzsche's tragic philosophy successfully embraces life, then it would seem that Kant's response to the tragedy of philosophy covertly reenergizes the life-denying morality of traditional philosophy. If his philosophy fails, however, it may be the case that Kant's proposal puts forward a superior response. The importance of this question extends beyond my assessment of Nietzsche's work, for the success of his understanding of tragedy as the eclipse of the rational by the aesthetic effects not only my assessment of *The Birth of Tragedy* but also the success of the contemporary Nietzschean view to provide an alternative to life-denying philosophy.

The answer to the question of whether Nietzsche's interpretation of tragedy is capable of affirming life turns on his relation to Schopenhauer's philosophy of art.³ For Walter Kaufmann, Nietzsche's denial of pessimism is the centerpiece of *The Birth of Tragedy*: "Instead of proving himself in his first book as an unswerving follower of Schopenhauer . . . Nietzsche discovers in Greek art a bulwark against Schopenhauer's pessimism." Because "Schopenhauer's negativistic pessimism is rejected," Kaufmann asserts that Nietzsche allows one to "face the terrors of history and nature with unbroken courage and say Yes to life."⁴ In Kaufmann's reading, it is precisely Nietzsche's novel view of art that allows him to reject Schopenhauer's conclusion and affirm life as a whole. For others such as Julian Young, while Nietzsche offers a "solution" to Schopenhauer's pessimism and a way of "overcoming" it, these solutions ultimately "represent, like Schopenhauer's, a flight from, a 'denial' of human life."⁵ Young argues that Nietzsche's philosophy not only reproduces Schopenhauer's philosophy of art but that it fails to learn from Schopenhauer's greatest insight: that if the tragic view is final, then moral repulsion is the truly human response.

In this chapter I argue that the primary aim of *The Birth of Tragedy* is in line with Schopenhauer's philosophy: to aestheticize reality. To begin, I briefly consider Schopenhauer's reading of Kant on the beautiful and the sublime, identifying his interpretation of tragedy as the form of art that links artistic creativity and the sublime. In light of Schopenhauer's philosophy of art, the next two sections examine the argument of *The Birth of Tragedy* in order to suggest that while Nietzsche offers significant insights into the affective dimensions of tragic experience, his interpretation does not refute the ethical

reading of tragedy. Instead, it ignores it. In the final section I identify the consequences of this neglect through reference to Franz Rosenzweig's critique of Nietzsche. The significance of Rosenzweig's critique for my argument is that it provides us with a vantage on Nietzsche's philosophy from a moment in history in which the ethical demands of modern Europe were coming to a particular climax. From the vantage of the disintegration anticipated by Nietzsche's philosophy, Rosenzweig argues that Nietzsche's critique of moral value is essential for any attempt to think in the collapse of philosophy. Yet he also argues that Nietzsche's aesthetic affirmation of life is incapable of making sense of the demands of an age beyond philosophical optimism, for it does not overcome the demand that human suffering places on us. Rosenzweig's argument will prove to be significant for the following chapters, for it shows that while Nietzsche's aesthetic redemption ultimately fails, the path to a new understanding of ethics cannot ignore his philosophy but must go beyond it. The task of going beyond Nietzsche's critique of value, as we find in Heidegger and Castoriadis, requires the development of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*.

Schopenhauer's metaphysics

To consider whether *The Birth of Tragedy* successfully provides an alternative to Schopenhauer's resignationism, it is necessarily to begin with Schopenhauer's reading of Kant's sublime. In §39 of *The World as Will and Representation* (vol. 1), Schopenhauer examines the difference between the beautiful and the sublime. He echoes Kant's understanding of the beautiful as that which pleases on its own, for it is free from determinate judgment (*WR I* 201–202). The beautiful affords an experience of pleasure disconnected from the interests of the will, meaning that it is universal. The sublime, on the other hand, is occasioned by objects that “have a hostile relation to the human will in general, as manifested in its objectivity, the human body” (*WR I* 201). Such objects “may be opposed to it; they may threaten it by their might that eliminates all resistance, or their immeasurable greatness may reduce it to naught” (*WR I* 201).

While Schopenhauer's understanding of the beautiful and sublime builds on Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, it takes a significant step beyond Kantian limits by granting aesthetics an ontological meaning. Like Kant, Schopenhauer argues that every subject knows the world only as representation. Yet departing from Kant, he suggests that there is one object of which the subject has “immediate” perception: the subject's own body. Schopen-

hauer reproduces the Kantian dualism between phenomena and the thing in itself, yet the thing in itself is not of an abstract, theoretical order. It is the will. While the representational character of cognition entails that the subject requires the principle of sufficient reason in order to guarantee her knowledge of phenomena, she has immediate access to her own body, thus requiring no metaphysical principle. Any affective state the body undergoes is not devoid of theoretical content and limited to mere feeling. Rather, it pertains to the thing in itself.

Kant argued that an ontological doctrine of the beautiful or the sublime is impossible, for neither are real determinations of the object but pertain either to relations such as harmony (the beautiful) or to ideas that go beyond the object such as grandiosity (the sublime). Schopenhauer was deeply unconvinced by the limited field Kant granted to feeling, and he suggested that if we consider the will as thing in itself, then it is possible, through feeling, to achieve a *positive* aesthetics that can achieve the objective characteristics of the sublime. In the experience of the sublime, “the beholder may not direct his attention to this relation to his will which is so pressing and hostile,” as in the monstrous, “but, although he perceives and acknowledges it, he may consciously turn away from it, forcibly tear himself from his will and its relations, and, giving himself up entirely to knowledge, may quietly contemplate, as pure, will-less subject of knowing, those very objects so terrible to the will” (*WR I* 202). When the beholder tears himself from his embodied relation to what is hostile, he “may comprehend only their Idea that is foreign to all relation, gladly linger over its contemplation, and consequently be elevated precisely in this way above himself, his person, his willing, and all willing” (*WR I* 202). When elevated above all willing, “he is then filled with the feeling of the sublime [*Erhaben*]; he is in the state of exaltation [*Erhebung*], and therefore the object that causes such a state is called *sublime*” (*WR I* 202).

Through identifying a kind of “knowledge” unique to the sublime, Schopenhauer rejects Kant’s notion of the unknowability of the aesthetic sphere and reestablishes a metaphysics of art. The sublime arouses terror in the spectator, transporting her into the realm of infinitude where another existence beyond the representable makes itself felt. Nunno Nabaais draws our attention to the paradoxical nature of Schopenhauer’s “beyond,” observing that the negation of life is actually an affirmation and a demand for another form of existence, one that occurs intuitively and only allows itself to be represented as a negative representation.⁶ The pleasure experienced is negative, for it does not seduce us but forces us to admire and respect it.

While the beautiful leads us to a positive intuition of the Idea in beautiful form, the sublime leads us to the negative intuition of the actual thing in itself. This is the knowledge of the will of the world itself in its unrepresentability, not one's own will but the eternal will (*das Er-Ein*).⁷

Schopenhauer insists that his metaphysics of art does not return to precritical metaphysics, for it enables the transcendental overcoming of metaphysical realism, extending the deepest insight of Kant's philosophy. Yet he struggles to maintain this position. Kant's aim was to give an intersubjective account of judgment based on his understanding of the transcendental realm that is presumed in any judgment made by any person. From the view of Schopenhauer's subjective understanding of will as thing in itself, however, this is impossible. Schopenhauer's main problem with *Critique of Judgment* is that Kant "does not start from the beautiful itself, from the direct, beautiful object of perception, but from the *judgment* concerning the beautiful, the so-called, and very badly so-called, judgment of taste" (*WR I* 530–531). Schopenhauer resists the reflective moment of Kant's aesthetic judgment, claiming that Kant focuses on aesthetic feeling as the expression of a universal claim rather than a genuine encounter with the beautiful. It is the universal validity of aesthetic judgment that struck Kant, Schopenhauer claims, "not the beautiful itself" (*WR I* 531).

Here Schopenhauer turns against Kant's transcendental philosophy, accusing Kant of ignoring beauty as a property of the object. Where Kant saw the universal validity of judgments of taste, Schopenhauer saw a merely heteronomous account of taste, which is why he claims that Kant's notion of taste is badly named; it is not taste at all. Schopenhauer dismisses Kant's transcendental account of intersubjectivity and charges Kant as guilty of a realist subjectivism in which judgments of the beautiful are not truly made by the subject but by another. Schopenhauer proposes an alternative in which the beautiful, as a property of an object, affects one's faculty for aesthetic emotion.

Schopenhauer's critique of Kantian judgments of beauty has significant implications of his understanding of the sublime. Rather than reaffirming the subject's moral agency *through* a negative feeling, the transformative nature of the sublime lies *in* the sublime feeling whereby the individual is raised out of the limitations of their individuality—from their retreat behind what Schopenhauer calls the "veil of *māyā*" (*WR I* 8, 253, 352), the supreme illusion—and into the condition of pure subject, abstracted from the threat faced to his own body by the object. The danger does not disappear, for the experience lifts him momentarily from the danger. The terrifying character of the experience does not lead to "moral reflection" (*WR I* 205) but dissolves

the individual will, transforming the beholder into one who contemplates nature ecstatically. Yet because the beholder feels crushed by the grandeur of what is contemplated, he is reduced to a state of absolute fragility and insignificance. Despite the initial escape from the veil of *māyā*, the only meaning he can give to this annihilation of the self is that of illusion.

In order to understand Nietzsche's relation to Schopenhauer, it is vital to piece Schopenhauer's relation of the sublime together with his reading of tragedy. Schopenhauer does not make this link explicit in the original 1819 manuscript of *The World as Will and Representation*, and it is not until the 1844 edition that he includes a section entitled "Aesthetics of Poetry" in which tragedy is recognized as belonging to the sublime. In the 1819 manuscript, the sublime is limited to music, which is "by no means like the other arts, namely a copy of the Ideas, but a *copy of the Will itself*" (WR I 257). By elevating music above what he calls the "representational arts," Schopenhauer displaces the subjectivist understanding of art we find in Kant, where artworks serve as occasions for the exercise of judgment.⁸ In the 1844 manuscript, however, Schopenhauer links the sublimity of music with a single kind of representational art: tragedy. Our "pleasure in the *tragedy*," he asserts, "belongs not to the feeling of the beautiful, but to that of the sublime; it is, in fact, the highest degree of this feeling" (WR II 433). Representational art is able to achieve this end, for the experience of the sublime in nature—of turning away from the interest of the will—is mirrored in tragic art: "in the tragic catastrophe we turn away from the will-to-live itself" (WR II 433).

Schopenhauer does not deny that tragedy is pleasurable. Rather, he argues that, as in judgments of sublimity, tragedy crushes the will to live, leaving us as disinterested observers before the monstrous suffering enclosed within the very fabric of life. In its ability to occasion the sublime, tragedy "is to be regarded, and is recognized, as the summit of poetic art, both as regards the greatness of the effect and the difficulty of the achievement" (WR I 252). This is because the Idea represented by art is not just any Idea, but the Idea of nature. The purpose "of this highest poetical achievement," Schopenhauer argues, "is the description of the terrible side of life. The unspeakable pain, the wretchedness and misery of mankind, the triumph of wickedness, the scornful mastery of chance, and the irretrievable fall of the just and the innocent are all here presented to us; and here is to be found a significant hint as to the nature of the world and existence" (WR I 252–253). The idea of nature leaves us recoiling, thereby transforming us to view it ecstatically. It is not a deliverance *from* pain but a deliverance

through pain. The spectator discovers that nature is nothing more than a representation, a dramatic illusion. He does not feel pity or empathy for the heroes; indeed, he is “foreign to all relation” (*WR I* 201). Opposed to Hegel’s spectator who is reconciled to her suffering, Schopenhauer’s spectator suspends her interest in her destiny, raising herself to the serenity of a pure aesthetic observer of the work of art, of nature itself.⁹ It is from the elevated vantage of the aesthetic observer who calmly surveys nature that the spectator discovers “that the world, that life, can never give real satisfaction and hence is *not worthy* of our affection: this constitutes the tragic spirit—it leads to resignation” (*WR II* 495).

While it is often recognized that Schopenhauer’s reading of tragedy entails a spirit of resignation, it is less often noted that it also involves a feeling of measured euphoria that allows the observer to rise above the world and survey its terrain as a disinterested spectator. In Béatrice Han-Pile’s analysis, for example, the pleasure released in the sublimity of tragic experience is what separates Nietzsche’s philosophy from Schopenhauer. While Nietzsche’s aesthetics entails an affirmative view of life, the “Schopenhauerian view would rather be that pain just begets more pain.”¹⁰ Yet Han-Pile’s reading of Schopenhauer is only accurate in terms of Schopenhauer’s ontology. While Schopenhauer asserts that the will is eternal lack endlessly striving for more, his reading of the Kantian sublime aims to provide a momentary overcoming of eternal pain, one that anticipates Nietzsche’s account of aesthetic justification. Han-Pile overlooks Schopenhauer’s reading of the sublime, finding Nietzsche’s aesthetic redemption as “radically un-Schopenhauerian.”¹¹ In the following examination of *The Birth of Tragedy*, I suggest that by understanding Schopenhauer’s view of tragedy in light of his reading of the sublime, Nietzsche’s understanding of aesthetic redemption is not so far from his view as Han-Pile suggests. In reproducing Schopenhauer’s understanding of the sublime, Nietzsche’s aesthetic redemption is not only unable to affirm life as a whole but ultimately proves an inferior response to the tragedy of philosophy, understood as the inevitable failure of technalized philosophy to encompass the whole of life, than Kant’s enlarged way of thinking.

The Apollinian and the Dionysian

In “Attempt at Self-Criticism,” Nietzsche suggests that the book’s main content was an inquiry into “the Greek’s relation to pain” (*BT* 21). While Hegel’s romantic vision of antiquity portrays the ancient Greeks as the

innocent childhood of Western culture's maturity, the young Nietzsche drew from Jacob Burckhardt, his colleague at Basel, illustrating a darker image of antiquity. Burckhardt argued that the brilliance of the Greeks turned upon two interdependent elements: their capacity to suffer and, despite their suffering, their ability to act without the fetters of tradition. "Where others lived and acted from dull compulsion," Burckhardt states, the Greeks "were free, spontaneous, original, and aware."¹² Yet as the human race was gifted with such freedom, they were also "subject to all the mistakes and sufferings of such a people." Burckhardt portrays ancient Greece as the locus of a play of forces, destructive and constructive, dark and light, providing a sharp alternative to the moralized universe of his own times. In particular, he identifies the chasm between the Greeks and the modern world in the Greek sensitivity to a quality of art to that "the Occident, even in the southern parts, today remains dull; . . . the periodically recurring Dionysian frenzy."¹³

Nietzsche's understanding of Greece builds on Burckhardt's work,¹⁴ attributing to the Greeks a distinctive sensibility to pain that is expressed by Dionysus' teacher, Silenus. Silenus is often referred to as the paradigm of pessimism, particularly for proclaiming that what "is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born, not to be, to be *nothing*. But the second best for you is—to die soon" (*BT* 42).¹⁵ Yet Nietzsche does not consider Silenus' wisdom as a manifesto of pessimism but as a clue to understanding the relation of the Greeks to pain. As we find in tragedy, pain is an essential moment in the affirmation of life. This becomes apparent in the climax in which pleasure and pain are intimately bound together: the so-called "tragic effect." By beginning his understanding of tragedy with the tragic effect, Nietzsche builds from Schopenhauer's reading of tragedy in terms of the sublime, meaning that he is less concerned with the content of the original tragedies than the aesthetic experience undergone by *any* spectator of tragic art, whether ancient or modern.

Nietzsche considers the question of the Greeks' relation to pain by examining the twin desires that coexist in the tragic effect: our "wish to see tragedy and at the same time to long to get beyond all seeing" (*BT* 141). The first desire to "see tragedy" is the pleasure we take in appearances and representations of life. The second compels us to go "beyond all seeing," to be transported to a reality that goes beyond mere appearance. In Kantian terms, we might relate one desire to the world of phenomena and the other to things in themselves. Both forces make their appearance in the opening lines of *The Birth of Tragedy*:

We shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics, once we perceive not merely by logical inference, but with immediate certainty of vision, that the continuous development of art is bound up with the *Apollinian* and *Dionysian* duality—just as procreation depends on the battle of the sexes, involving perpetual strife with only periodically intervening reconciliations. (33)

From the outset it is clear that Nietzsche aims to subvert the logical procedure of aesthetics by proceeding from the immediacy of vision in a way that is not dissimilar to Hegel's depiction of the original reception of tragedy. This immediate certainty pertains to the metaphysical solace of the tragic effect that, counter to Aristotle's *Poetics* and Hegel's notion of reconciliation, cannot be captured philosophically. As I will suggest when I turn to Rosenzweig, by prioritizing the metaphysical solace of tragedy, Nietzsche understands the ethical dimensions of tragedy—suffering, loss, the demands of law and family—as mere occasions for the tragic effect, meaning that there is no question of reenergizing ethics after the tragedy of philosophy. While logical inference has a role to play in his account, it is preparatory for rather than anticipated by aesthetic experience.

By starting with the immediate certainty of vision, Nietzsche's account of aesthetics resonates with Wagner, who identified the death of tragedy in the historical moment when "every impulse of Art stood still before Philosophy."¹⁶ Wagner argues that tragedy dies when "the spirit of *Community* split itself along a thousand lines of egoistic cleavage," for the self-sure monad of philosophical man cannot experience the duality of tragic play. To retrieve this primordial account of art from underneath the veil of aesthetics, Nietzsche insists that art does not anticipate higher forms of representation but is a "continuous" development involving "perpetual strife" of the Apollinian and the Dionysian duality. Like male and female, the Apollinian and the Dionysian have an erotic relation. They desire to be fused together despite their radical difference. Their moments of procreation, their "periodically intervening reconciliation," bear new offspring, new forms of art that give witness to their dissonant interplay.

It is important to note that while the Apollinian and Dionysian are expressed through human creativity in Nietzsche's aesthetics, they ultimately "burst forth from nature herself, *without mediation of the artist*" (BT 38). Nietzsche's aesthetics turn on a radical conception of nature wherein the material world is not governed by Spirit or divine intellect but is infused with the dissonant energies of music. These dissonant energies can be

thought of in terms of dream and intoxication. Apollinian art, on the one hand, is the art of the image-maker. Its hero is the god Apollo, the god of all representational energies, and relates to dreams to the extent that it pertains to the inner world of fantasy. Like the dream, Apollinian art individuates us, driving us toward the recesses of inner life. Yet even while the dream is most alive, even when the philosopher is most introspective, “we still have, glimmering through it, the sensation that it is *mere appearance*” (BT 34). It is the Apollinian that drives us to look beyond appearances to the heart of things in the frame of individual reflection.

The Apollinian individuates to the extent that it calls the philosopher toward doubt about the external world, turning her inward in the search for inner certainty. Drawing from Schopenhauer’s image of individual man wrapped in the veil of *māyā* (WR I 352), Nietzsche describes the Apollinian as the drive that impels us to retreat into a solipsistic cocoon of logical harmony that has no windows. Our retreat into our own interior drives us to find a principle of sufficient reason that entails, as Leibniz pronounced, “that nothing happens without a reason why it should be rather than otherwise.”¹⁷ Armed with this principle we assume that every event expresses God’s underlying goodness. While Leibniz deemed this principle necessary to seal the presence of God’s grace in creation, Nietzsche reads it inversely, arguing that it demonstrates “how necessary is the entire world of suffering” (BT 34). By spinning this “redeeming vision,” Apollo allows one to “sit quietly in his tossing bark, amid the waves” (BT 35–36), content that all the suffering in the world is justified.

Opposed to the Apollinian drive, the Dionysian stirrings become manifest in the terror one experiences when one realizes that the “principle of sufficient reason, in some other of its manifestations, seems to suffer an exception” (BT 36). When our logical systems fail, when we stumble across a single appearance that refuses to submit to reason’s necessity, everything “subjective vanishes into complete self-forgetfulness” (BT 36). Nietzsche states that the Dionysian pertains to the drive that longs to extend beyond the borders of the self and to fuse with the collective. It is felt in collective intoxication and in the heightened feeling of life that comes in the approach of spring. In such experiences the veil of *māyā* is torn apart to reveal the primordial will—Schopenhauer’s *Er-Ein*—and each will loses the buffering of philosophical subjectivity and becomes “one with his neighbour,” each “feels himself to be a god” (BT 37).

In the Dionysian we find that truth is not found in the rational principle of sufficiency but in excess. From the intoxicated vantage of primal

Oneness, contradiction is not something requiring healing but is “the bliss born of pain,” a metaphysical solace in the face of the terrifying realities of life (*BT* 47). The Dionysian not only discloses the heart of the Greeks, for it draws us into the pleasure found in the painful vision of life itself; it also anticipates Wagner’s manifesto that “in this Art-work we shall all be *one*.”¹⁸

Nietzsche’s understanding of the antinomy between the Dionysian and the Apollinian confronts Hegel’s dialectic. This antinomy is not a resolvable contradiction between unintegrated parts of ethical life but two conflicting ways of resolving the problem of pain by transforming it into a kind of pleasure. As Gilles Deleuze explains, “Dionysus and Apollo are . . . not opposed as the terms of a contradiction but rather as two antithetical ways of resolving it; Apollo mediately, in the contemplation of the plastic image, Dionysus immediately in the reproduction, in the musical symbol of the will.”¹⁹ In Nietzsche’s terms, the Apollinian constructs a beautiful image that “overcomes the suffering of the individual by the radiant glorification of the eternity of the phenomenon” (*BT* 104). The Dionysian returns to primordial unity by shattering the individual and dragging him “into the great shipwreck and . . . into original being.”²⁰ In other words, Apollo obliterates pain while Dionysus allows us to participate in the abundance of being. Tragedy reconciles this antithesis, for in tragic art “Apollo, finally, speaks the language of Dionysus: and so the highest goal of tragedy and of art in general is attained” (*BT* 130). Nietzsche concludes that “we must understand Greek tragedy as the Dionysian which ever anew discharges itself in an Apollinian world of images” (*BT* 64–65).

Béatrice Han-Pile suggests that Nietzsche’s understanding of Dionysian pleasure is counter to Schopenhauer’s notion of the will as eternal pain. Although the will’s suffering remains primary in that it is the motivating drive for the production of pleasure, Han-Pile argues that “Nietzsche departs doubly from Schopenhauer’s model: firstly, he sees pleasure as a positive force, not only the cessation of pain; secondly, he also asserts the possibility of pleasure overcoming pain (‘an excess of pleasure’).”²¹ Yet is Nietzsche’s pleasure an overcoming of pain, or is it an aesthetic removal from the pain and its replacement by a momentary feeling of ecstasy, much the same as Schopenhauer’s sublime? It is often unclear in *The Birth of Tragedy* whether it is the Dionysian itself that finds pleasure in the terrifying realities of life, or whether the Dionysian, when coupled with the Apollinian, is that artistic drive that can look into the terrifying heart of reality and yet find solace in art. If Dionysian experience is the source of aesthetic pleasure, then Han-Pile’s reading gains more credence, for the Dionysian would allow the will

itself—what Schopenhauer condemned to eternal disappointment—to be lifted from its sorrows in the experience of pleasure. But if pleasure properly comes from experiencing the kind of artwork that couples the Dionysian and the Apollinian, then Nabais' connection of Schopenhauer's sublime and Nietzsche's aesthetic catharsis would prove to be correct. Aesthetic pleasure would not be the will's ecstasy but the pleasure we find when we are, for the fleeting moment of aesthetic sentiment, lifted above the concerns of the will, enabled to survey the world from the vantage of the ecstatic spectator.

Nietzsche provides statements that could support both views, meaning that it is necessary to turn to his broader relation to Schopenhauer in order to find whether his aesthetic redemption is an illusion or whether it redeems reality itself. For Schopenhauer, the proper domain of music is not art but metaphysics. It is distinguished from all other arts and representational activities, including language, "by the fact that it is not a copy of the phenomenon . . . but an immediate copy of the will itself" (*WR I* 309).²² To this Nietzsche agrees.²³ The world itself is a representation of a more basic reality: it is "embodied music" or "embodied will" (*BT* 102). Yet given Nietzsche's intention to build an affirmation of life from his reading of tragedy, a representational form of art that is metaphysically inferior to music, Schopenhauer seems a strange ally. If the world is "embodied music," then music has an *ontological* significance (it pertains to reality), while tragedy, a form of poetry, has a merely *aesthetic* significance (it is merely a representational activity).

Here we find a basic tension underpinning Nietzsche's argument in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In writing this text Nietzsche aims to achieve two things: to write a philosophy of art and to graft Wagner's total theater into a narrative of the rebirth of tragedy. On one side Nietzsche claims that "the history of the rise of Greek tragedy now tells us with luminous precision how the tragic art of the Greeks was really born out of the spirit of music" (*BT* 105). Nietzsche is writing a philosophy of art in which the spirit of music strives "toward visual and mythical objectification" (*BT* 106) in tragic poetry, suggesting that music demands words in order to bring to feeling what only words and actions can: "The structure of the scene and the visual images reveal a deeper wisdom than the poet himself can put into words and concepts" (*BT* 105). Thus tragedy brings us to a certain climax of the metaphysical reality of music. Yet on the other side, it is not the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides that take us to the summit of art but the musician who uses tragic myth as a resource to draw his audience into the metaphysical reality of music: "what the word-poet

did not succeed in doing, namely , attain the highest spiritualization and identity of the myth, he might well succeed in doing every moment as creative musician!" (*BT* 105). Music, Nietzsche informs us, in its "absolute sovereignty does not *need* the image and the concept, but merely *endures* them as accompaniments " (*BT* 55). It seems that it is not the tragedians as much as Wagner who truly understands the essence of the tragic.²⁴ The essence of tragedy does not lie in words, poetry, or anything particular to Greek culture but in *music*. When I turn to Rosenzweig's theory of tragedy I will suggest that this move is problematic, for it entails that the content expressed in the words of the tragedians is a mere occasion for the spirit of music to manifest itself. For Rosenzweig, this does not assist Nietzsche in his attempt to escape Platonic metaphysics, for it effectively inverts Plato's hierarchy of reality over appearance, thus failing to provide an alternative. The ethical, historical, and cultural gap between antiquity and the modern age becomes appearance while reality—that is, the spirit of music—unites them in a common experience.²⁵

If music is so sovereign, and if words and images do not truly enhance music, then it is necessary to clarify the relationship between music and tragedy in order to decide whether Nietzsche's philosophy of art truly overcomes Schopenhauer's pessimism. Nietzsche suggests that poetry can "express nothing that did not already lie hidden in the vast universality and absoluteness in the music. . . . Language can never adequately render the cosmic symbolism of music " (*BT* 55). This view of the deficiency of words and the absoluteness of music displaces tragedy as the highest art, reflecting not only a Schopenhauerian view that music can take us to a deeper reality than words but also an attempt to promote Wagner's complete music-drama as the manifestation of Greek spirit in the present age. This tension suggests that Nietzsche intends to affirm Schopenhauer's metaphysics, but with an added caveat: while music unveils the terrible, dissonant heart of reality, art—and tragic art in particular—can provide something on the level of representation, a 'splendid illusion,' that can move even the darkest Hamlet to embrace life as a whole and act within it " (*BT* 143). If art remains a splendid illusion, it does not reconcile us to reality or make us at home in the world. Rather, it occasions a fleeting moment of aesthetic catharsis in the face of the dissonant heart of reality. If this is the case, then Nietzsche's philosophy does not depart from Schopenhauer's on an ontological level; rather, it echoes Schopenhauer's recognition of an aesthetic moment of escape.

If art merely occasions a fleeting moment of aesthetic catharsis, then the main thrust of Nietzsche's argument fits with Nabais' view: the Diony-

sian pleases through a kind of illusion. Art, for Nietzsche, “is not merely imitation of the reality of nature” but also “a metaphysical supplement to the reality of nature, placed beside it for its overcoming” (*BT* 140). Even Dionysian art provides a kind of illusion, albeit one that is different to Apollinian art: “every artist is an ‘imitator’: either an Apollinian artist in dreams, or a Dionysian artist in ecstasies” (*BT* 38). This resonates with a remark Nietzsche made in his early notebooks where he argues that the fact that we cannot handle reality, that we need illusion to bear with reality, is exactly “what is tragic.”²⁶

Nietzsche’s understanding of Dionysian comfort seems contradictory. At the same moment it is both a confrontation with reality yet also a blissful illusion. The contradiction dissolves, however, when we see the Dionysian in light of Schopenhauer’s sublime. As we have seen, Schopenhauer’s notion of the sublime turns on a confrontation with the terrible realities of life whereby we are raised out of the limitations of our individuality and into the condition of pure subject, the *Er-Ein*, where we are abstracted from the threat faced to our own bodies by the terrible. By annulling the will, this experience allows us to contemplate the terrible heart of reality ecstatically. Nabais suggests that what Nietzsche adds to Schopenhauer is the Apollinian desire for appearances that finds comfort in an artistic representation of reality: “For Nietzsche, the mystery of Greek tragedy consisted precisely in the fact that at the heart of the drama there was this tension, between the One of mystical fusion with the universe in Dionysian delirium and the Multiple of the characters of Apollonian drama as they struggled to affirm the hero’s individuality.”²⁷

Here we find a further clue to the question of the Greek’s relation to pain. Tragic art is made possible by a people who have borne great pain, who have “looked boldly right into the terrible destructiveness of so-called world history as well as the cruelty of nature” and, instead of being overcome by it or taking on a “Buddhist negation of the will,” find “metaphysical comfort” in the fact that “life is at the bottom of things, despite all the changes of appearances, indestructibly powerful and pleasurable” (*BT* 59). *Prima facie*, Nietzsche seems to put forward a view that reflects Han-Pile’s reading—indeed, Han-Pile cites this assertion as a key part of her defense of his redemptive metaphysics²⁸—for he suggests that the Dionysian affirms that life is ultimately pleasurable. However, while Nietzsche uses ontological language to assert that life at base *is* pleasurable, this insight does not come from looking into the heart of nature. Rather, it comes from “the chorus of satyrs,” that is, from *tragic art*, the coupling of the Dionysian and

Apollinian. It is only in aesthetic experience that life is pleasurable, and we find ourselves again close to Schopenhauer's metaphysics of art. Nietzsche compares Dionysian man to Hamlet, for "both have once looked truly into the essence of things, they have *gained knowledge*, and nausea inhibits action; for their action could not change anything in the eternal nature of things. . . . Knowledge kills action; action requires the veils of illusion" (BT 60). What is sublime about the Greeks, what takes them beyond the wisdom of Hamlet, is that they could look into the terrible with open eyes and yet create an illusion that enabled them to act; an illusion that enabled them to engage in politics and to generate a rich cultural life. Nietzsche concludes that to look into the painful depths of reality and to find art as a healing power is the very essence of tragedy. In this way, art "saves . . . and through art—life" (BT 59). Even Han-Pile recognizes that it is art that redeems, stating that the "Apollonian relieves us of suffering by showing a heroic vision of individuation which makes human existence seem more beautiful than it really is."²⁹ The Dionysian illusion is nothing like the optimism in which the essence of reality adheres to logical form. Rather, it turns on the "sublime as artistic taming of the horrible" (BT 60). Reality is only pleasurable once it has been tamed by sublime, aesthetic experience. The redemption is found in art, in an artistic taming of the terrors of this life.

The death and rebirth of tragedy

Thus far I have identified a fundamental tension in Nietzsche's argument in *The Birth of Tragedy*. On one hand, art confronts us with the terrors of life but occasions a blissful illusion. On the other hand, the illusion turns out to be reality while the terrors of life are the mere means by which the spirit of music comes into appearance. In order to discern whether this blissful illusion can ultimately justify existence, it is important to consider the role of history in Nietzsche's understanding of tragedy. As we saw in the previous chapter, Hegel argues that tragedy justifies existence to the extent that it reconciles us to the slaughterhouse of historical progress. In contrast, Nietzsche argues that tragedy can only justify existence in terms of aesthetics, meaning that history is important only to the extent that tragedy might be born again.

In the opening lines of *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche made it clear that he understands tragedy as a historical phenomenon. Once we cease to experience tragedy with the immediate certainty of vision and subsume it

within our conceptual grasp, tragedy is effectively dead. Nietzsche insists that the death of tragedy is no accident, for tragedy contains within it the logic of its own demise. While other forms of art “died the most beautiful and peaceful deaths” as they faded away with great ages, tragedy “died by suicide,” that is to say, it died “tragically” (BT 76). Yet the Apollinian drive to render life intelligible does not only occlude our perception of tragedy, it also contains the seeds for the rebirth of tragedy. The insatiable search for order causes the Apollinian to stumble across the groundlessness of logic, setting the stage for tragedy’s renewal.

In Nietzsche’s account, death is contained in the nature of tragic art in the following way. The heroes of Aeschylus and Sophocles embody the confluence of the Apollinian and the Dionysian, for in them there is no inner/outer distinction but simply the raw presentation of the natural forces at work in the human being. Aeschylus is famed for placing multiple actors on stage, thus breaking the atomized individuality of Homeric, Apollinian art and allowing the Dionysian element to enter through revealing the fragility of the boundaries between individuals. Yet as the tragedians come to a greater awareness of their art, they begin to fill their characters with a rich inner life. The Dionysian and Apollinian elements become autonomous and the fated collision of the tragic heroes is removed.

This development occurs in the work of Euripides, who imbues his characters with greater interior reality than Aeschylus or Sophocles. Nietzsche describes this in terms of bringing the *spectator* on stage, placing an everyday character capable of judging and deliberating in the midst of the tragic collision. The Euripidean hero is not absorbed in the action. Rather, he stands back and assumes the position of judge, meaning that reflective pathos replaces the immediacy of action. What Nietzsche intends to show us is that Euripides’ ability to craft reflective characters means that he is not so much a poet as a thinker. The name of Euripides’ spectator is not the god Apollo or Dionysus but an “altogether newborn daemon, called *Socrates*” (BT 82). Socrates gives birth to an anti-mythical drive to render all things intelligible, to banish contingency, mystery, contradiction, and intuition and to replace it with necessity, knowledge, reconciliation, and concepts. By forming an alliance with Socrates, “Euripides dared to be the herald of a new art” (BT 86). As the Apollinian is dismembered and made to be the primary power without opposition, the dissonance between the two art drives is replaced with a new, unproductive opposition between the *Socratic* and the *Dionysian*. When the Socratic replaces the Apollinian, consciousness replaces the dream and immediate certainty is replaced with the logical inference. The

erotic relation between the Apollinian and Dionysian is removed as both drives become “cool, paradoxical thoughts” (BT 83).

Nietzsche views Socrates as a historical marker for a fundamental shift in the figuration of artistic forces that extends into the present world. Socrates is “the vortex and turning-point of so-called world history,” for his “influence has spread out across all posterity to this very day, and indeed into the whole future, like a shadow growing ever longer in the evening sun” (BT 96). He is not a scientist who emerges from the murky territory of myth. Rather, he is the “mystagogue of science,” peddling a new mythology in which nature itself can be understood and harnessed for the ends of humankind. With Socrates’ love for systematic knowledge comes a new archetype: theoretical man. Theoretical man “combats Dionysian wisdom and art,” seeks to “dissolve myth,” and “substitutes for a metaphysical comfort an earthly consonance, in fact, a *deus ex machina* of its own” (BT 109). He embodies a new mode of being that “combats Dionysian wisdom and art,” believing that it can “correct the world by knowledge, guide life by science, and actually confine the individual within a limited sphere of solvable problems, from which he can cheerfully say to life: ‘I desire you: you are worth knowing.’” By constructing the world as a set of solvable problems, theoretical man announces a new age that is no longer characterized by tragic bliss but cheerfulness. Greek cheerfulness is nothing like the bliss born in pain that we find in tragic art. Instead, it theorizes life, constructing an inhabitable, logical cosmos in which the mind can find stability and solace. In the logical cosmos the wounds of history can be healed as theoretical man is buffered from the forces that play around him. The supreme law of Socratism is thus revealed in the maxim “to be beautiful everything must be intelligible” (BT 83–84). Beauty is thus figured as the confirmation of the morally good.

Nietzsche states that after Euripides changes the face of tragedy, the cheerfulness of Socratism solidifies in Plato’s *Republic*. In Nietzsche’s reading of this text, Plato is said to condemn tragedy for representing what is pleasant rather than what is useful. This condemnation leads Plato to conclude that tragedy does not “tell the truth” (BT 90). Basic to Plato’s argument is the doctrine of *mimesis*, which entails that art is “a wretched copy of the phenomenon, and therefore infinitely poorer than the phenomenon itself” (BT 107). It gives birth to a new kind of art that either imitates the sounds of the phenomenal world like cannon shots and marching armies or attempts to “save the eye from gazing into the horrors of night and to deliver the subject by the healing balm of illusion from the spasms of the agitations

of the will" (BT 118). Here Nietzsche's critique seems to be less concerned with Greek art than it is with the opera of his own day. "The features of opera," he argues, "do not by any means exhibit the elegiac sorrow of an eternal loss, but rather the cheerfulness of eternal rediscovery, the comfortable delight in an idyllic reality which one can at least always imagine as real" (BT 118). Like the Socratic art of antiquity, the optimism of modern opera "drives music out of tragedy under the lash of its syllogisms" (BT 118). Schopenhauer makes a similar point in response to Hegel, arguing that optimism is a "really *wicked* way of thinking," for it "makes a mockery of the unspeakable suffering of humankind" (WR I 326). He argues that tragedy "sanctifies" us from this mode of thinking and places us on "the road of salvation," for the

peculiar effect of the tragedy rests ultimately on the fact that it shakes that inborn error [to think that the end of life is happiness], since it furnishes a vivid illustration of the frustration of the human effort and of the vanity of this whole existence in a great and striking example, and thereby reveals life's deepest meaning; for this reason, tragedy is recognised as the sublimest form of poetry. (WR II 635)

Yet by "sanctifying" us in such a way, Schopenhauer does not believe that tragedy is capable of redeeming existence; rather, tragedy purifies our way of thinking so that we can acknowledge the suffering of humanity. As I will suggest when I turn to Rosenzweig's critique of Nietzsche, it is on the ability of tragedy to justify existence that Nietzsche and Schopenhauer truly depart.

Building on Schopenhauer's critique of "wicked" thinking, Nietzsche argues that Socratic optimism obscures the primordial relation to pain characteristic of the Greeks. While he gives several accounts of the transition between tragic and Socratic art, the thrust of Nietzsche's argument is that Socratic art does not comfort us intuitively but by appealing to our logical faculties. The "*dénouements* of the new dramas" are purely intellectual (BT 108), and "the *deus ex machina* took the place of metaphysical comfort" (BT 109). Theodicy replaces tragedy and the cheerfulness that would render everything explainable forces the Dionysian to the margins of society and culture in the form of mystery cults.

Nietzsche goes to great lengths to outline the conditions of the birth and death of tragedy for a particular reason: to promote the rebirth of tragedy in modern life. To do so he links tragedy with the scientific impulse.

Because reason seeks perfection, it leads to the image of an infinite God in which there is no becoming, no life. Yet in its quest for perfection, the theoretical system searches for ever-greater understanding until it cannot do other than stumble across its own limits, thereby reopening the terrifying dimensions of reality that were obscured by its logical optimism. Nietzsche insists that the theoretical certainty that all of nature is intelligible is hugely important for art, for it “leads science again and again to its limits at which it must turn into *art—which is really the aim of this mechanism*” (BT 95–96). What Nietzsche is trying to show is that art and science are not so much opposed in their goal as they are in their method, for both are concerned with the truth. When science fails and art takes its place, science does not die. It is reoriented to its original goal. The logician is thus perfectly located to bring a rebirth in tragic art, for when “they see to their horror how logic coils up at these boundaries and finally bites its own tail—suddenly the new form of insight breaks through, *tragic insight* which, merely to be endured, needs art as a protection and a remedy” (BT 98).

The important place of logical inquiry in tragic knowledge links the Presocratic poets with modern thinkers such as Kant and Schopenhauer through their “monstrous courage and wisdom” (BT 112).³⁰ By pushing logic to its limit, Kant and Schopenhauer stumble upon the failure of logical thinking (which for Nietzsche has the same character as mythical thinking) to exhaust reality. What sets the Greeks apart from Kant, however, is that by acknowledging the monstrous excess of nature they discovered art as a healing power: they were able to present “the *sublime* as the artistic taming of the horrible” (BT 60). Nietzsche stresses the difference between Greek art and Kant’s moralized sublime, which releases the powers of reason in the practical sphere. While Kant prioritizes the affirmative dimension of the sublime as the deepest insight of aesthetic experience, reenergizing the moral project within the horrors of lived experience, Nietzsche argues that the Greeks were primarily attentive to the pain of human existence and discovered the sublime as a creative mode of *taming* the horrible.

While Kant does not achieve the full insights of the ancient Greeks, for he refuses to let go of remnants of traditional, anti-tragic philosophy, Nietzsche argues that his recognition of the limits of thought opens the possible return of tragedy. He states that it is “only after the spirit of science has been pursued to its limits and its claim to universal validity destroyed by the evidence of these limits may we hope for a rebirth of tragedy” (BT 106). To cleave open this beginning and reanimate the tragic spirit in modern life, we must “seek the pleasure that is peculiar to [tragic art] in the purely

aesthetic sphere, without transgressing into the region of pity, fear, or the morally sublime" (BT 141). Seeking this pleasure does not require that we return to the time of the ancient Greeks, however, for the task of overcoming scientific optimism does not require a denial of everything that has occurred in modernity. Nietzsche seeks to cleave open Kant's insight with "a form of culture for which we should have to use the symbol *of the music-practicing Socrates*" (BT 116). Exactly what a music-practicing Socrates would look like remains unclear (though we can safely assume that it looks a lot like Wagner). The problem to be solved is that after the monstrous discovery of the limits of thought, "no comfort avails any more" (BT 60). In such a context, "man now sees everywhere only the horror or absurdity of existence" and is "nauseated" (BT 60). Modern man cannot retreat from science but requires art as a healing power. Nietzsche's figure of the music-practicing Socrates gives a provocative image of a scientific culture that does not cease from exploring the depths of nature and yet, through its art, affirms life as a whole; life in all its contradiction, cruelty, and pleasure.

At the heart of Nietzsche's project is the attempt to elucidate the "metaphysical comfort without which the delight in tragedy cannot be explained at all" (BT 108) in such a way that reveals the seeds of a new age of tragic art from within the nihilism of modernity. It is for the aim of ushering in this new world that he makes his repeated claim that "it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally justified" (BT 22). We are now in a position to assess whether Nietzsche's claim is warranted. To do so, we must consider his argument as a whole. Throughout *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche argues that before one can feel the desire and joy for existence, one must free oneself from the delusion that one can heal the wound of existence through Socratic passion for knowledge. This freedom, however, uncovers the abyssal reality of things that can only be endured with art as a remedy, for to be able to live in the full freedom of dissonance, one "would need a splendid illusion that would cover dissonance with a veil of beauty" (BT 143). This veil of beauty "is the true artistic aim of Apollo in whose name we comprehend all those countless illusions of the beauty of mere appearance that at every moment make life worth living at all and prompt the desire to live on in order to experience the next moment" (BT 143). Here we find again a point that many commentators overlook: that the Dionysian and the Apollinian are not exclusive in Nietzsche's understanding of tragic art. Rather, the two art drives must be united if art is to reach its summit: Dionysian in that art looks beyond appearances into the terrifying heart of reality, Apollinian in

the sense that art provides a “splendid illusion” that makes life worth living. The moments of terror are thus necessary for the possibility of redemption, for “when the danger to his will is greatest, *art* approaches as a saving sorceress, expert at healing. She alone knows how to turn these nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live” (*BT* 60).

Nietzsche intends the notion of aesthetic justification to provide an alternative to Hegelian reconciliation, for he believes that Hegel’s rational approach to justification breaks faith with life. In Nietzsche’s understanding, a culture of tragedy would entail a denunciation of the desire for intellectual satisfaction. This is because philosophies in search of healing do not take the terror of existence seriously. Instead, they occlude the terrifying side of life by anthropomorphizing reality as something that meets our desire for harmonious knowledge. Nietzsche argues that it is only the art that stems from pain and sorrow that can justify the alteration, process, and suffering of life. Such artworks “transfigure a region in whose joyous chords dissonance as well as the terrible image of the world fade away charmingly” (*BT* 143). The lasting example of such art remains Greek tragedy, which plays “with the sting of displeasure” in order to “justify the existence of even the ‘worst world’” (*BT* 143).

Nietzsche’s claim that even the worst world can be justified aesthetically runs parallel with Schopenhauer’s notion of the sublime illusion. The world cannot be justified in *moral* terms, in Nietzsche’s view, for he assumes that a moral system must posit the existence of another world of peace and order to maintain its logical cohesion. Nietzsche compares us to soldiers painted on the canvases of a battle scene; our protest that the world should be kinder is as ridiculous as their protest would be (*BT* 52). Life can only be justified *aesthetically*, for in art “the struggle, the pain, the destruction of phenomena, now all appear necessary to us . . . in view of the exuberant fertility of the eternal will” (*BT* 104). This is the essence of an aesthetic justification: from the view of the striving Will of the world we discover that the pain of life is necessary for its fertility. Such a justification is “eternal,” for it transports us to “the eternal life beyond all phenomena” (*BT* 104) where we discover that annihilation is part of life as a whole. In the same movement of Schopenhauer’s sublime transportation, the spectator is lifted out of her individuation—her moral self that is repulsed by the spectacle of life—and participates in the life of the primordial One (*das Er-Ein*). She feels crushed by the grandeur of what is contemplated and is reduced to a state of absolute insignificance. The only meaning she can give to

this annihilation of the self is that of illusion. Unlike moral sublimity or traditional theodicies, Nietzsche claims that *nothing* is negated in a purely aesthetic justification; that is, except the self. The whole, with all its horror, is contemplated with serene pleasure.

While Nietzsche's aesthetic justification might warrant greater pleasure than the culmination of Schopenhauer's aesthetics, where the spectator ecstatically perceives nature as a whole, both accounts end in the advantage of the aesthetic observer who finds, only for a moment, a solution to the so-called wisdom of Silenus. Redemption is brought by art, and on this point, as John Sallis argues, "there is complete solidarity between Schopenhauer and Nietzsche."³¹ The point at which Schopenhauer and Nietzsche diverge is a matter of where they place value. In the following section I suggest that where Nietzsche departs from Schopenhauer on the question of value has significant consequences for the kind of "life" that his aesthetic theory is capable of justifying. For Nietzsche, the ecstatic illusion justifies the whole: "art is . . . a metaphysical supplement to the reality of nature, placed beside it for its overcoming" (*BT* 140). By identifying art as a supplement to the reality of nature he locates value entirely in the realm of appearance, meaning that "life becomes the copy and art the reality" (*BT* 107). For Schopenhauer, on the other hand, sublime ecstasy is devoid of value. At the moment when we are torn from the will, "we have given ourselves up to pure, will-less knowing, we have stepped into another world, so to speak, where everything that moves our will, and thus violently agitates us, no longer exists" (*WR I* 197). This liberation of knowledge "lifts us wholly and completely above all this as do sleep and dreams." While Schopenhauer identifies the realm of happiness in "another world," it is a world devoid of value. The aesthetic illusion cannot provide justification for the terrors of nature, for it is only a momentary transplantation from nature. In Schopenhauer's paradigm we conclude that reality is not "worth our attachment" and thus resign in aesthetic contemplation (*WR II* 434).

Tragedy and ethics

Both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche grappled with philosophical questions dominated by Hegel's work. In this context, both sought to divorce aesthetics from ethics. One of the basic reasons that Nietzsche and Schopenhauer sought this separation is that they perceived their own times as a decline of world culture. For Nietzsche at least, this decline announced the failure of

Kantian ethics and Hegelian dialectics and demanded something new. Yet as Czech poet Czesław Miłosz suggests, while the cultural shifts of Nietzsche's lifetime were indeed significant, Nietzsche "did not experience the rapid and violent changes of the next century, whose only possible analogy may be the time of the Peloponnesian war, as we know it from Thucydides."³² Miłosz suggests that during the early twentieth century, especially in the tumultuous years following the First World War, philosophers did not only find Hegel's attempt to fuse history and ethics inadequate to make sense of their times, they also found Nietzsche's separation of the aesthetic and the ethical unable to provide a way of thinking through new ethical demands. For example, Franz Rosenzweig criticized both Hegel and Nietzsche, outlining a new kind of philosophy that he called "the new thinking" (*das neue Denken*). As Peter Gordon notes, Rosenzweig's new school aims to recognize "the philosophical merits of modernity since Nietzsche."³³ Yet far from advancing the progressive claims of modernity, Rosenzweig draws upon Judaism in search for a philosophy that is oriented substantively upon nature and yet renounces the metaphysical drive toward knowledge, thereby opening a way of knowing based on interpersonal communication.

In his major work, *The Star of Redemption* (1921), Rosenzweig provides an important response to Nietzsche's interpretation of tragedy for my argument in this book. While his central focus is to critique Hegelian thought through resources drawn from the Jewish tradition, he proposes to do this by going *through* Nietzsche, by reading Nietzsche as an epochal voice in world history.³⁴ The importance of Rosenzweig's proposal for my argument is that it calls Hegel's understanding of tragedy into question through Nietzsche's philosophy, opening the way for Heidegger and Castoriadis to search for a path beyond Nietzsche through reconsidering the importance of tragedy to philosophy. He achieves this, I suggest, by returning to Kant's emphasis on the singularity of works of art.

From the disquieting opening lines of *The Star of Redemption* it is clear that Rosenzweig saw his new thinking in continuity with Nietzsche's philosophy. He begins by connecting the Western project of metaphysics to the fear of death: "it is from the fear of death that all cognition of the All begins. To cast off the fear of the earthly, to remove from death its poisonous sting, from Hades its pestilential breath, in this Philosophy deceives itself" (SR 9).³⁵ Philosophy aims to justify the transitory nature of experience by flying free from death through speculation. The human capacity for self-deception is enhanced to such a degree through the power of philosophy that it is only revealed when the individual is confronted with death as a

real possibility. Like Nietzsche, Rosenzweig proposes an alternative path to justify existence that is in accord with the postmetaphysical desire to remain in the world. Yet departing from Nietzsche, he does not think that this justification can occur if we understand reality without the restrictions of morality. Rather, Rosenzweig argues that this-worldly justification is only possible if it is understood in relation to an *aesthetic* kind of value that renders victimization ethically intelligible.

Rosenzweig focuses his critique on Nietzsche's inverted metaphysics. By rendering the images, words, and content of the tragedies as peripheral to the essence of tragedy, Nietzsche renders the basic elements of tragedy—suffering, guilt, and hubris—as mere occasions through which the tragic essence shines forth. On this point Nietzsche builds on Schopenhauer: by examining tragedy in terms of the spirit of music, Nietzsche removes the prospects for redemption from the pity and fear that comes from our ethical relation to the world. For Rosenzweig, this move simply obfuscates the serious themes and content of tragic art, for they are decried as mere appearance. As Nietzsche asserts, music—the animating principle of tragedy—“does not need the image and the concept, but merely *endures* them as accompaniments” (*BT* 55). Tragedy does not need image and concept, for language “can never adequately render the cosmic symbolism of music.” Rosenzweig argues that by removing the content of the tragedies from their essential nature—that is, the presentation of suffering—Nietzsche not only renders philosophy unable to escape the fear of death that underpins the metaphysical project but also leaves philosophy without a language that is adequate to the experience of those who suffer.

This latter problem was of particular concern to Rosenzweig, who searched for a philosophy that was capable of speaking to the experience of the Jewish people in Europe. While Nietzsche's affirmation of the creative energies of life seemed attractive to many who felt the destructive power of life and the futility of human efforts, Rosenzweig saw that Nietzsche's solution could only justify life to the spectator by occluding the intricate demands of the victims who suffer at the hands of an unjust ethical order. Nietzsche suggests that tragedy elevates the spectator above the endless striving of the will, thus allowing him to survey the world with the rapacious ecstasy of the artesian god. For Rosenzweig, however, tragedy *heightens* our sense of self, revealing the complex relation between the self and the collective ethical order. He suggests that the attention the Greeks gave to the human as the “measure of all things” gave a particular insight into the greatness and the weakness of the self (*SR* 65, 82). When the

hero is silenced in the culminating moment of tragedy, she is stripped of the immediacy of all ethical categories. Every relational category or self-distinction (such as being a friend, family, citizen, and so on) is revealed as a moral presupposition. In the tragic silence, the “figure of the Self, freeing itself from all the rights of the genus, takes possession of its throne in a defiant isolation” (SR 82). Yet the sign of greatness granted to the self in this moment is simultaneously “the mark of its weakness: it is silent. The tragic hero has only one language that is in perfect accordance with him: precisely, silence” (SR 85). Far from appraising Schopenhauer’s moral resignation, Rosenzweig argues that the hero loves life. Her act of defiance is a personal claim to ethical justice. Thus the significance of tragic silence cannot be limited to tragic pathos, the mysterious tragic pleasure that is felt by the spectator. Rosenzweig refuses to view tragic pathos as the sublime taming of the terrible, for such comfort only comes at the exclusion of linguistic expression. Instead, he argues that tragic silence utters an unrepresentable kind of value that is discovered by the spectator with ears and eyes wide open. By suffering in silence the hero is not reconciled to a fate scripted by the gods; her silent suffering unveils the gods’ injustice, thereby transforming the relation of the spectators to the passing daemonic order as the hero stands as witness to a new age. Her silent witness shows that language—that communication—is the very seat of value. Rosenzweig concludes that the path that can take us beyond Nietzsche requires that we not only displace philosophy as the bearer of value, but that we open new, interpersonal modes of sense making.

Rosenzweig’s understanding of tragedy comes to a particular climax in his presentation of *Nietzsche* as a tragic hero. He links the silence of the tragic hero with Nietzsche’s silence on ethics, placing Nietzsche’s philosophy as an epochal moment in world history. By negating God through the silence of tragic spectatorship, both “the tragic hero and Nietzsche figure the emergence of meaning from absolute immanence as a speaking silence in which sacrificial embodiment reverses into spiteful self-destruction” (SR 82). Against the moralized society of his times, Nietzsche resists the attempt to provide a moral justification of the terrors and atrocities of life. Moreover, he holds no contempt for life based on moral grounds.³⁶ In baring the injustice of the world in moral silence he thus becomes our “metaethical self,” an image of our raw selfhood stripped of all ethical categories, thereby issuing a new kind of ethics in the abyss left after the failure of the moral worldview (SR 82). While Nietzsche is incapable of guiding us into a new age, Rosenzweig argues that he cannot be ignored. He is the one “whom none who must philosophize can henceforth bypass” (SR 15).

His philosophy forms a passage through which any contemporary theory of tragedy must venture.

This passage is faced with the challenge of transforming traditional philosophy's reliance on metaphysics into a new practice of value. For Rosenzweig, Nietzsche's attempt to aestheticize reality does not transform traditional metaphysics. Instead, it inverts it. His search for the metaphysical comfort that transcends the particularity of the artwork retains the metaphysical ideal of original concepts, for it reproduces the hierarchical dualism between appearance and reality wherein consciousness becomes the fiction from which art must liberate us. To find an alternative, Rosenzweig turns to Kant's reassessment of the kind of value available in aesthetics. What is of particular importance to Rosenzweig is Kant's attempt to situate an immanent kind of value in the aesthetic sphere that is not rational but reasoned. In Kant's understanding of the singularity of the artwork, every idea violates a previous mode of presentation in order to establish a new norm. By rejecting Kant's attention to the singularity of the artwork, Nietzsche's metaphysics of art opens the abyss of aestheticism, for the reality underneath art is so central that neither the content of the artwork nor the artist has any significance. Thus it is only by presuming that we are merely artistic images, soldiers painted on the canvases of a battlefield, that it is possible to justify existence as an aesthetic phenomenon. Rosenzweig argues that this presumption reveals exactly to whom existence is justified in Nietzsche's account. It is not justified to the soldiers on the battlefields, for they are mere playthings of the true subject. Rather, it is to the "sole author and spectator of this comedy of art" to whom the world is justified, for this author creates such a world for the purposes of preparing "a perpetual entertainment for itself" (*BT* 52). As a solution to suffering, humans are offered the chance to transcend their humanity, to fly from individuality in order to fuse with the Primal One and participate in its self-justification. In this transcendence the reality behind the conflict is brought to the fore, while the structural conditions of the world presented on stage are left unchallenged. Tragedy's implied critique of hubris, excess, and stubborn fixity falls to the wayside. The spectator is thus protected from any true transformation.

Rosenzweig's reading of Nietzsche shows that the self-justification of the Primal One does nothing to refute the wisdom of Silenus. While Han-Pile goes to great lengths to argue that Nietzsche "departs doubly" from Silenus' wisdom, Rosenzweig assists us to see that Nietzsche does not even try.³⁷ All aesthetic justification can do is cover the consciousness of what it is like to be human in an illusion, a reverse illusion that renders conscious life as the problem. Nietzsche's solution ends up being a simple value judgment,

inverting the truth-appearance hierarchy and rescuing the individual from the abyss of truth by maintaining the sphere of illusion as the sphere in which existence is justified. Rosenzweig, on the other hand, wants nothing of illusions. Nietzsche's aestheticism obscures historical actuality in the form of human suffering, choosing aesthetic catharsis over what is real. Rosenzweig concludes that the task of interpreting tragedy is to remove this illusion for the sake of historical actuality—for the sake of truth.

Recovering the historical actuality of art can only be done by refuting Nietzsche's anti-subjectivist account of art as the creation of an external author in favor of an account of aesthetics that maintains the creativity of the artist. Rosenzweig notes that when the dissonance within the human artist has created both the manifestations of the human world and man himself, philosophy collapses into nihilism and tragedy is dissolved into the dreams of the chorus and the spectators. The hero, her suffering, the reversal and recognition, fate, guilt, and mourning become fleeting appearances that afford a feeling of elevation in the spectator. Philosophical reflection comes to an end, because Nietzsche's metaphysics of art could not refute the argument that *The Birth of Tragedy* is yet another illusion.³⁸

Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption* assists us to see that Nietzsche's commitment to Schopenhauer's metaphysics of art in *The Birth of Tragedy* entails a plea for the rebirth of a kind of tragic art that leaves us in serene ecstasy before what formerly terrified us, no longer afraid but now participating in the creative and destructive activity of the "reckless and amoral artist-god who wants to experience, whether he is building or bullying, . . . his own joy and glory" (*BT* 22). In such an experience, the suffering of the characters on stage—and the suffering of people in our own world—ceases to be ethically demanding.³⁹ The perspective on Nietzsche's theory of tragedy we gain from Rosenzweig reveals that while a radically aesthetic view of reality is appealing where it diagnoses the life-denying tendencies of traditional thought, it also *denies life* by reducing living facts to the manifestation of an aesthetic struggle between Apollo and Dionysus. However, while Rosenzweig shows that Nietzsche's aesthetic justification cannot redeem life, he also shows that it cannot be ignored. As I will suggest in the following chapter, Rosenzweig's argument proves significant for Heidegger, who also argues philosophy can only take *this* world seriously if it is able to navigate Nietzsche's critique of moral philosophy in the effort to outline a new understanding of value. Following Rosenzweig, Heidegger elaborates a new understanding of value in a manner that builds on Kant's notion of the aesthetic idea, and his emphasis on the singularity of the artwork.

Heidegger

Greek Tragedy

There is only Greek tragedy and no other besides it. Only the essence of Being as experienced by the Greeks has this primordial character.

—Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*

While Heidegger never acknowledged a conceptual debt to Rosenzweig—indeed, he was overtly hostile to what he called the “Judaization” (*Verjudung*) of the university and went to great lengths to distinguish his thinking from Jewish influences¹—Rosenzweig claimed that the “new thinking” advanced in *The Star of Redemption* assisted Heidegger to take important steps toward a new philosophy cognizant of human finitude.² Rosenzweig’s claim is plausible, for there are striking similarities between their philosophical projects. Both Heidegger and Rosenzweig diagnose metaphysics as a world-historical error. Both respond to this problem with reference to tragedy. However, in the years that followed Rosenzweig’s reflections on the proximity of his own work to Heidegger’s fundamental ontology, each thinker pursued a radically different response to the error of metaphysics. Rosenzweig left the academy to found the House of Jewish Learning (*Jüdisches Lehrhaus*) in order to focus on dialogue as the means of transformation. Heidegger attempted to use his position in the academy to guide matters of politics according to the instruction of philosophy. During this transition, Heidegger began to frame metaphysics as a “planetary movement” that finds its ultimate culmination in technology. He interprets the present age as the time of a fated ending, for the error of Western metaphysics made by Plato and Aristotle extends into the twentieth century through the power of technology to define human knowing through the paradigm of *techne*.³ As Rainer Schürmann notes,

while the politicians of his time were preoccupied with the question of *what* one is to think, Heidegger saw the fundamental question confronting his era as *how* one is to think; in particular, “How is one to bear in mind that which gives itself without submitting it straight away to subsumptions?”⁴ Heidegger entered the political arena with the goal of overcoming the “technalized” frame of thinking that had dominated the modern epoch.

Heidegger’s philosophy is indebted to Kant’s critical project in two important ways. In his early work, Heidegger found Kant’s notion of the transcendental synthesis developed in the A edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*—the pure image produced by the imagination—to express a mode of thinking that precedes the subsumptive account of thinking that pervades Western philosophy.⁵ The transcendental synthesis precedes the application of the understanding, thereby eclipsing the problematic separation of subject from object. Yet in his work following *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger increasingly drew from Kant’s account of reflection in *Critique of Judgment*. This account not only provides an alternative to subsumptive thought but also elucidates the poetic and historical dimensions it entails. However, while Kant suggested that reflective judgment properly develops through the organic development of a community’s cultural sphere, Heidegger called for an assertive approach in order to confront the planetary scale of technalized thinking. He rejects Kant’s call for a new procedure for thinking that disrupts the hegemony that philosophy has traditionally held over the political sphere and instead outlines a new way of thinking that rejects the Western separation of philosophy from politics altogether. This move ties the fate of philosophy to that of politics, deeming the separation of the two spheres as the ultimate expression of technology. To recover a way of thinking that can reunite politics and philosophy, Heidegger turns to the time when thinking about politics preceded the Western tradition of metaphysics, to the time of Greek tragedy.

Recognizing that Heidegger’s treatment of Greek tragedy is intimately connected with his account of politics leads us to his involvement with National Socialism. Much has been written on this topic,⁶ and the recent publication of *Black Notebooks*, Heidegger’s personal writings between 1931 and 1941, has placed the political character of his work as the preeminent issue in Heidegger scholarship.⁷ My approach in this chapter, however, will be quite limited. Specifically, I will consider his lectures on tragedy in light of the comments he made on his relation to National Socialism in a letter to Karl Jaspers in 1950. The importance of these comments for the present study is that Heidegger attempts to justify his actions through

reference to his philosophy and, in particular, to his work on tragedy. In particular, he distances himself from the direction that National Socialism took after his brief time as the rector of Freiburg University, stating that his lectures given between 1933 and 1942 constituted a “confrontation” with the party that was evident to “everyone who could hear clearly.”⁸ On first glance this defense seems ungrounded, for these lectures deal primarily with Greek tragedy, Hölderlin’s poetry, and Nietzsche’s critique of metaphysics. However, Heidegger explains that his intent was to contest the National Socialist appropriations of Hölderlin and Nietzsche, to criticize Nazism’s understanding of its historical destiny, and to question the technical thinking that became central to the National Socialist movement.⁹ In other words, Heidegger claims that his confrontation with National Socialism consisted in reconsidering its basic sources in order to reveal that it had fallen prey to the planetary “abandonment of Being” it ought, in his view, to counteract.¹⁰

In this chapter I examine Heidegger’s understanding of tragedy in two lecture series in which he undertakes the alleged “confrontation” with National Socialism, namely, *Introduction to Metaphysics* and *Hölderlin’s Hymn “The Ister.”* Between the two courses, one given in 1935 and the other in 1942, Heidegger’s interpretation of tragedy shifts along with his understanding of his task as a philosopher. I suggest that, at first, Heidegger’s interpretation of tragedy provides an insightful diagnosis of the problem of technalized thinking. However, while I suggest that Heidegger’s diagnosis is insightful, I argue that the alternative he provides is incapable of affecting any kind of confrontation with National Socialism. By employing Greek tragedy to frame the primary political question of his times in terms of philosophy, Heidegger not only occludes human suffering from the scope of tragedy’s concern but is also complicit with totalitarianism. I conclude by suggesting that the challenge left by Heidegger’s work is to outline a way of thinking that neither assumes the traditional hegemony of the philosophical over the political nor wholly conflates the two.

Philosophy and politics

Before I turn to two of Heidegger’s lecture series given during the National Socialist era, it will be helpful to identify several developments occurring in Heidegger’s political thought during the late 1920s and early 1930s. In his first major work, *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger shows no explicit political interest. The problem he confronts is framed in purely philosophical

terms as the “forgetting of Being.” To forget Being is to limit our possibilities to those ascribed to us within an inherited way of thinking, for we confuse the way that beings appear with Being itself. In response to this problem, Heidegger advances a *philosophical* approach; his goal is to counteract this error through reanimating the “question of the meaning of Being” (*Be&T* 19).

What is important to note is that Heidegger interprets historical and political problems in terms of his fundamental ontology. He suggests that the primary problems that we face are not the kind of problems that require solutions. Rather, they are the result of an ontological condition that requires our understanding of *Being* to be transformed. To search for a solution to the social problems that we face entirely in terms of new laws, policies, strategies, and technologies is to assume that all the pieces of the puzzle are available for the solution. All we require is the application of the correct technique. Heidegger argues that this way of thinking occludes a more basic problem concerning our understanding of Being.

Heidegger’s ontological framing of philosophical and social problems takes on a historical dimension in the years following *Being and Time*. During the early 1930s, he moves away from an ahistorical, transcultural analysis of experience to emphasize the social and historical dimensions that condition the forgetting of Being. At the heart of the problem Heidegger identifies a “technalized” mode of thinking that is a result of the history of Western metaphysics. In this framework, technology is not limited to the development and production of machines but is a way of framing the world as a whole. As Jacques Taminiaux states, technological framing “offers nothing to thought other than the way of calculus, for which whatever is gets exhausted in its availability for all kinds of manipulations, forms of planning and renewed evaluations.”¹¹ Heidegger links Plato’s mathematical understanding of creation, Aquinas’ notion of efficient causation, Descartes’ calculative reason, Newton’s causal understanding of nature, and Kant’s theoretical reason with modern technology, arguing that these developments constitute a history of metaphysics that limits knowledge to what thought can produce. Technalized thinking is not simply the result of an individual error made by those who are absorbed in beings, as was the case in *Being and Time*. It is a planetary, global movement that is unable to see the difference between Being and beings. If the forgetting of Being is a planetary movement of technalized thinking, then the retrieval of Being (a philosophical task) must become a historical task that encompasses every domain of collective life. In other words, it must become political.

In an entry in his *Black Notebooks* in the autumn of 1932, Heidegger describes this move in terms of “*The end of ‘philosophy.’*” “We must bring philosophy to its end,” he states, “and thus prepare for the completely other—metapolitics. And, correspondingly, the *transformation of science.*”¹² Heidegger’s reference to metapolitics is illuminating, for it gives an important insight into one of the motivations behind his development in the coming years. Metapolitics is the Platonic project to conceive of philosophy as a sphere that is above the political, one that ought to provide its ground and direction. In a move that continues to trouble his critics, Heidegger ties the ontological project of retrieving Being to the German nation. He turns to National Socialism as the medium through which the German nation might realize its spiritual calling at the direction of philosophy.

Shortly after the Nazis established a one-party state in 1933, Heidegger accepted the role of National Socialist rector of Freiburg University, thrusting himself into the political arena. In his inaugural Rector’s Address, he outlines a political solution to confront the problem posed by technologized thinking. He argues that the technological framing of the world can only be overcome if the German people “submit to the command of the beginning,” for only in this way can they avoid falling into “the settled comfort of a safe occupation” (RA 474). Heidegger identifies this “beginning” in Greek tragedy, grounding the German people in continuity with the ancient Greeks. Aeschylus’ poetic voice in *Prometheus Bound* brought a new, philosophical epoch into being that was extended in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. Listening to the command of the first beginning entails that science must take up the task of Greek *techne*, becoming “the fundamental happening of our spiritual being as part of a people” (RA 474). This “great” notion of *techne*, to borrow Taminiaux’s words, is far from the “petty” *techne* that governs modern technology.¹³ In the Greek framework, *techne* does not concern the unlimited application of human knowledge onto the world. Rather, it is the task of “questioning” and “holding of one’s ground” (RA 474) in the drive for determinacy in the modern world by participating in the first questioning inaugurated by the Greeks. This requires that science be released from its servitude to technology and exposed

once again to the fertility and blessing bestowed by all the world-shaping powers of human-historical being (*Dasein*), such as: nature, history, language; people, custom, state; poetry, thought, faith; disease, madness, death; law, economy, technology. (RA 474)

Heidegger's argument, in sum, is that the university must take a political role in the National Socialist movement, for it has exclusive access to Greek *techne* that is unavailable to the Western political tradition.

Despite these visionary claims, Heidegger suddenly resigned from the rectorate in February 1934, and his political career ended not even a year after accepting the position. While this was by no means a break with National Socialism, it seems that Heidegger became discontent with the party's philosophical direction, perhaps even personally affronted, as John Caputo suggests, that "the party was inclined to pass up the opportunity to have the greatest German philosopher since Nietzsche as its spiritual leader."¹⁴ The double failure of his attempt to raise the question of the meaning of Being as a philosopher and his attempt to sway the direction of National Socialism as a politician affected the way he understood his role as a thinker. Heidegger came to see that radical questioning did not fit with the direction of the Nazi Party, that the Nuremberg rallies did not gather the German people around the question of Being but expressed a display of omnipotent power, and that the interpretation of Nietzsche provided by Nazi philosophers such as Alfred Baeumler merely reinforced the legitimacy of Nazi policy rather than exposing the groundlessness of metaphysics.

Heidegger's disappointment led him to enlist the help of Nietzsche and Hölderlin in order to confront the global movement of technologized thinking of which National Socialism had become a part. By making this move, Heidegger rejects Plato and Aristotle as protagonists of the first beginning. He now argues that their conception of *techne* is so concerned with identifying the eternal character of the *eidōs* that it narrows the conception of our relationship to nature to the instrumental application of human knowledge on the world. Thus it is Plato and Aristotle who begin the historical forgetting of the difference between Being and beings, for they limit Being to what can be constituted by *techne*. Under their reign, thinking becomes a matter of correctness, of invariably discerning what is right and wrong, what is beautiful and ugly.

In the years following his resignation from the rectorate, Heidegger attempts to identify a way of thinking that could overcome the technologized thinking of Western metaphysics through an engagement with art and with tragedy in particular. He suggests that tragedy opens us to an alternative origin to philosophical thinking than Plato and Aristotle. Instead of adjudicating appearances according to a preestablished standard, tragedy is characterized by the ability to allow the differential character of human life to appear, revealing the world in such a way that resists totalization. In the con-

text of the argument in this book, Heidegger both continues and transforms the ongoing problematic of tragedy. He builds on the notion of tragedy as a poetic kind of thinking that gives an alternative to the determination of knowledge as *techné*. Yet he removes Aristotle's formal understanding of tragedy. In other words, he argues that tragedy does not *represent* inherited content in new form, but that it brings forth the differential character of Being that lies *beneath* representational thinking. For Heidegger, in the time when tragic theater soared to the summit of Greek cultural life, poets, philosophers, and statesman undertook a radical questioning of Being. In their work we are confronted with a political realm that is not the domain of rationality, right and wrong, policy, and practice—that is, of actualities in general—but a primordial realm of possibilities around which the poet gathers a people through a shared attention to Being.

In his lectures given in the years after his resignation from the rectorate, Heidegger argues that the separation of philosophy and politics is an expression of the technologized thinking that, historically speaking, characterizes the modern era. This notion of history is essentially Hegelian.¹⁵ Heidegger recognizes that Hegel assists us to see that the social world is composed of a diverse range of interrelated activities: political, economic, moral, religious, scientific, and so on. At different historical moments the forms of activity that take the position of normative and cognitive authority push others to the periphery, which, in terms of their historicity, effects a change in their meaning. In this sense Heidegger accepts Hegel's "end of art" thesis, the notion that in modernity art has been dislodged from the authoritative position it held in the Greek world to be replaced by other normative and cognitive meaning-giving activities. Yet rather than reading this as a historical progression, he suggests that the current activity that governs our thinking—technology—occludes the insights that could be found when art held a position of authority in forming the ethical life of a community. To overcome this separation of art from thinking, mirrored in the separation of politics from philosophy, Heidegger spends the next decade grappling with the work of Presocratic thinkers, in particular, with the Greek tragedians.

Introduction to Metaphysics

A year after his resignation from the rectorate, Heidegger gave a lecture series entitled "Introduction to Metaphysics" in which he returns to Greek tragedy

to outline how philosophy might assist the state to rediscover Being. His understanding of tragedy shifts from what we find in his Rector's Address as he searches for a more nuanced understanding of poetic *techne* that could save the German people from the snares of Western metaphysics. In particular, he aims to provide a new kind of thinking by locating moments in history where artistic thinking exceeds metaphysics. These moments interrupt philosophical speculation, thereby drawing us, as spectators in the present, into the original experience of artistic truth. Again, Heidegger identifies Greek tragedy as the preeminent art form for this task. However, he ceases to consider philosophy in terms of metapolitics, that is, as the legislator of politics. Instead, he views the separation of philosophy and politics as the expression of Western metaphysics that must be called into question.

From the outset of *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger fashions his project as a search for the origin of thinking that predates Plato and Aristotle's separation of *techne* from *poiesis*. By separating *poiesis* from *techne*, Heidegger deems that Plato and Aristotle remove the nonsubsumptive dimension of *poiesis* from practical knowledge. Once *poiesis* has been removed from practical knowledge, *techne* becomes a purely subsumptive mode of thinking that frames the natural strata as an amalgamation of raw materials waiting for technical transformation.¹⁶ This separation comes to a climax in Kant's technical understanding of judgment in *Critique of Pure Reason*, wherein reason is "occupied with nothing but itself"; it "commands" and "legislates" nature, "framing for itself with perfect spontaneity an order of its own according to ideas, to which it adapts the empirical conditions" (CPR A680/B708, A548/B576). The distinction between what is given and what is constituted is rendered absolute, meaning that only what is constituted can be known.

Despite Kant's definitive account of subsumptive thinking, Heidegger draws from Nietzsche's reading of Kant as the thinker whose monstrous courage enabled him to unveil the subjective interest concealed within logic. He insists that by highlighting the distinction between what is constituted and what is given, Kant opened philosophy to the poetic dimension of practical knowledge that had been lost in the Western tradition. Reflective judgment identifies a way of thinking that isolates the intuitive content of perception and yet makes a rational claim to universality, thus opening a philosophically significant mode of appearance that does not involve constitution. For Heidegger, this discovery is so radical that, despite the fact that Kant kept this intuitive kind of knowledge subordinate to determinate content, his response to the failure of philosophy to determine all knowledge

in the paradigm of *techne* serves as a lasting example of the nonsubsumptive thinking his own philosophy aims to find. In order to build from the attention Kant gave to the contingent appearance of nature, Heidegger seeks to prioritize the intuitive dimension of Kant's insight, turning to the work of thinkers who precede the initial error of separating *techne* and *poiesis*—who precede Plato's metaphysics—in order to find a display of the originary power of *techne*.

Heidegger begins by diagnosing the present political crisis in terms of ontology. Reflecting the kind of rhetorical move that is rehearsed repeatedly in *Black Notebooks*, Heidegger couches this discussion in a sweeping metaphysical account of nationhood: the German people, he states, lie “in the pincers between Russia and America, which are metaphysically the same in regard to their world-character and relation to the spirit” (*IM* 47–48). Russia and America are metaphysically the same, for both show “the same hopeless frenzy of unchained technology and of the rootless organization of the average man.” Rather than “listening to spirit,” they relate to spirit via a “technological assault” (*IM* 52). In order “to recapture, to repeat” a time in which technology did not hinder the task of listening to spirit, Heidegger proposes a violent (*gewalttätig*) response.

Before I consider Heidegger's proposal for a violent response, it is necessary to identify what he means by “listening to spirit” and how violence might assist in this task. Heidegger explains what listening to spirit does *not* look like through a critique of Nietzsche. Echoing Rosenzweig, he characterizes Nietzsche as the “last metaphysician,” departing sharply from Baeumler's depiction of Nietzsche as a proto-National Socialist. While Nietzsche insightfully criticized the “highest concepts” of philosophy as “the final wisp of evaporating reality” (*IM* 38, cf. *TI* 80), Heidegger argues that he failed to search for a more primary meaning of Being. Instead, he simply rejects Being altogether. By rejecting Being, Nietzsche displays the same quest for ultimacy that he aims to overcome, thereby becoming “the unrecognized witness to a new necessity” (*IM* 39), that is, to the history of metaphysics. In order to grasp the necessity to which Nietzsche bore witness, Heidegger argues we must reject the “hero worship” of the “clumsy and trifling importunities of the horde of scribblers that is becoming ever more numerous around him today.” Yet rather than following Rosenzweig, who aimed to overcome Nietzsche by reinvesting in interpersonal conversation, Heidegger proposes a *philosophical* response. The question we must begin with, he states, is “How does it stand with Being?” (*IM* 41), or alternatively, “What is the meaning of Being?” (*IM* 44). This question does not involve

the existential analytic Heidegger undertook in *Being and Time*. Instead, it expresses a historical task whereby we “repeat and retrieve the inception of our historical-spiritual” being so that it might be “transformed” (IM 41). This is the very task of “listening to spirit”: to undertake “an originally attuned, knowing resolution to the essence of Being” (IM 52).

Yet how could such a task be violent? The answer takes Heidegger some time to explain, for it turns on a long reflection on the qualities of *technē* we find in the Presocratic thinkers. He deems this reflection to be necessary, for the task of “listening to spirit” involves a knowing resolution to the appearance of Being we find expressed in their thought. Heidegger begins this resolution with Parmenides’ famous third fragment, which reads *to gar auto noein estin te kai einai*.¹⁷ The tradition of Western metaphysics renders this fragment as “because thinking and being are the same,” conjoining the knowledge of the thinker with Being itself. This picture of thinking renders the world as ready-made for thought to intuit its structure (IM 154), entailing that thinking is a faculty of the human being who is already defined as a rational animal (IM 189). In contrast, Heidegger posits a translation that he believes to be unencumbered by metaphysics: “belonging-together reciprocally are apprehension and Being” (IM 155). In this rendering, Parmenides does not posit the unity of Being and thinking. Rather, he uncovers the mutual relationship between thought and Being, where Being is a “happening,” a temporal event in which humanity itself happens (IM 6). Heidegger claims that Parmenides’ understanding of *technē* is a poetic mode of thought that “brings forth what is present out of unconcealment.”

By unveiling the shared event of apprehension and Being, Heidegger argues that his translation of Parmenides’ third fragment transforms the way we think about nature. Our modern, technical framing of the world begins with the translation of *phusis* as “nature,” which derives from the Latin *natura* (“to be born” or “birth”) (IM 14). Heidegger argues that the Latin translation “thrusts aside” the originary content of the word and becomes the definitive understanding of nature during the Middle Ages. It posits nature as the determining ground of beings, ascribing a sufficient reason for every appearance in the model of Aristotle’s efficient causation. Nature becomes the stable essence of beings, meaning that poetic creativity (*poiesis*) must be understood in terms of *mimesis*, imitation.¹⁸ By understanding *poiesis* as the imitation of *phusis*, medieval philosophy removed the concealing/disclosing event from the “nature” of beings.

Yet building on Hegel’s work, Heidegger also recognizes “an echo of knowledge about the originary meaning” of nature in Aristotle’s conception

of final causation (*IM* 17). Aristotle's notion of final causation grants an artistic dimension to *phusis* as that which "emerges from itself (for example, the emergence, the blossoming, of a rose)" (*IM* 15). In the paradigm of final causation, *phusis* is "the unfolding that opens itself up . . . the coming-into-appearance in such unfolding" (*IM* 15). This generous, self-giving dimension of nature is experienced everywhere: in the rising of the sun, the surging of the sea, in the growth of plants, and in the coming forth of human beings from the womb. Yet Heidegger informs us that *phusis* "is not synonymous with these processes, which we still today count as part of 'nature'" (*IM* 15). *Phusis* does not name one process among others that we observe in beings. Rather, *phusis* "is Being itself, by virtue of which beings first become and remain observable" (*IM* 15).

Heidegger's aim is to reverse the priority of nature in experience, suggesting that it was not by a natural process that the Greeks first experienced what *phusis* is, but that it was by the self-giving character of *phusis* that the Greeks experienced natural processes. In this framework, it was on the basis of an experience of Being in poetry and thought that "what they had to call *phusis* disclosed itself to them" (*IM* 16).¹⁹ Heidegger's notion of *phusis* provides an alternative to the conception of nature Kant develops in *Critique of Pure Reason* that is known exclusively through the constitutive power of the understanding. Yet it clearly builds on Kant's enlarged conception of nature in *Critique of Judgment*. Like Kant, Heidegger came to see that to question the limits of *techne* is to question the very being of nature. If nature appears to us as art, then the interest of technical thinking to frame the world according to predetermined rules remains oblivious to the self-appearance of beings that precedes subsumption. Drawing our attention to this primordial appearance, Heidegger takes human existence as the unavoidable starting point for any attempt to think about nature. This starting point displaces *phusis* from the tradition of Western thought that has understood nature as a determining ground and replaces it with a dynamic sense of happening and unconcealing. Under the temporal conditions of *techne*, *phusis* is uncovered through poetic engagement with the world.²⁰

To allow this primordial meaning of *phusis* to appear, Heidegger searches for a connection between thinking (*noein*) and poetry (*poiesis*) in Greek tragedy. He is particularly interested in Sophocles' famous choral ode in *Antigone*, in which the chorus sings of a world dominated by technical knowledge and its terrible consequences. In a world that opens the ambiguity of human creativity, the chorus describes human beings as *deinos* (awe-inspiring, wondrous, terrifying), which Heidegger translates, following

Hölderlin, as “uncanny” (*Unheimlich*): “Manifold is the uncanny (*deinos*), yet nothing / uncanner than man bestirs itself, rising up beyond him” (*IM* 156–158). Heidegger identifies the importance of Sophocles’ poetizing of *anthropos* in the fact that he does not describe the human being in terms of the established references of his time: the gods, social status, Hölderlin’s poetry, and so forth. Neither are his words intelligible according to the established references of our own time: Aristotle’s rational animal, the reversal-recognition structure of *Poetics*, Descartes’ thinking thing, or Kant’s unity of apperception. Rather, they transport us to an understanding of human beings that precedes Western ontology.

Heidegger aims to draw out this transportation through an extensive exploration of the word *deinon*. To this end he interprets the ode as an exploration of three different spheres in which the nature of the *deinos* is displayed: the conquering of inanimate nature, the domestication of animals, and the ordering of cities. First, *anthropos* “wears away” (*apotruetai*) the inanimate world, destroying both age and place (*hupertatan*) in order to create something new. It disrupts the resistance of the earth to decay (*aphthitos*), beginning the degeneration of the earth. It upsets the rest of the earth (*akamatos*) by constantly working it.²¹ Second, the chorus depicts *anthropos* as the conqueror (*kratei*) of animals, mastering the art of capturing animals and harnessing them for human service. And finally, *anthropos* teaches itself speech and has the temperament to build and rule cities. This is not some naturally ordained skill but is necessitated by *anthropos*’ vulnerability to the frost of winter and the lashing of rain. Unlike Aristotle’s portrayal of *anthropos* as a political animal who realizes its nature through creating cities, Sophocles presents the building of cities as the human attempt to delay death.

The significance of the three “scenes of disclosure” is that each presents the “overpowering” (*das Über-wältigende*), that is, something in nature that resists determination by *techne*. Importantly, Heidegger does not view the constitution of boats, spears, and cities as acts of human creativity but as things that were formed in order to commune with nature. This seems at odds with his understanding of the products of *techne* as a kind of violence against nature. However, violence and communing are not contradictory in his account of *techne*, and to this extent he no longer translates *techne* simply as “knowing,” as he did in the Rector’s Address (472), but as “transgressive knowledge” (*IM* 170), emphasizing *techne*’s violent quality. Heidegger’s poet is akin to Kant’s genius, for the poet not only has an intimate communion with nature but is “the one who is *violence-doing*, the creative one, who

sets out into the un-said, who breaks into the unthought, who compels what has never happened, and makes appear what is unseen" (*IM* 172). Yet Heidegger's poet diverges from Kant's genius on an important point, for the poet does not create *new* form. Rather, the poet brings forth what is unseen, that is, Being itself. The violence of *techne*, such as in the building of a boat, is countered by the return of the movement of nature, for the products of *techne* become swept away by the elements they attempted to harness. They are "scenes of disclosure" because, through their destruction, human beings come to recognize the temporality of things and begin to question the truth of Being.²²

Heidegger's notion of the disclosive nature of *techne* builds on Hölderlin's account of tragedy. Hölderlin identifies the power of tragedy in terms of its form of presentation, in particular, its ability to present humans as a paradox, as both nature's servant and that through which nature appears:

The significance of tragedies can be understood most easily by way of paradox. Since all potential is divided justly and equally, everything that is original appears not in its original strength, but rather, properly, in its weakness. . . . Properly speaking, the original can only appear in its weakness; but insofar as the sign in itself is posited as insignificant = 0, the original, the hidden ground of every nature, can also present itself. If nature properly presents itself in its weakest talent, then, when it shows itself in its strongest talent, the sign = 0.²³

Hölderlin suggests that tragedy is a sacrifice that humans make to nature in order to allow it to come into appearance. In the tragic hero's demise (when the sign = 0) nature is shown to be the conqueror. However, by showing nature to be the conqueror, human beings come finally to significance; they reveal that nature is = 0, that is, that nature does not provide a principle of sufficient reason to justify the necessity of events. Thus, paradoxically, it is by sacrificing themselves to nature that humans reveal themselves to be free from necessity.

For both Hölderlin and Heidegger, the conception of *techne* expressed in the choral ode is far from Aristotle's understanding of *techne* as a uniquely human virtue whereby the agent produces something according to a rule. The choral ode depicts *techne* as a form of knowledge that is not necessarily under human control. *Techne* can produce either bad or good, destruction or greatness. It is associated with escape, and yet while *anthropos* can escape

from most of nature—even at the expense of becoming *apolis*, without a city, or *aporos*, losing its way—it cannot escape its own death. In death *anthropos* encounters the limits of its skillfulness. Thus the better humanity becomes at conquering the land through agriculture, at domesticating animals for the production of food, and at governing cities, the more it will come to think that *techne* might be able to control the tumult of nature. At the moment the poetic movement of “great” *techne* disappears, it collapses into the “petty” *techne* we find in Plato and Aristotle. By escaping the natural elements and banishing death from our midst, the tragic movement of nature vanishes.

In his analysis of the primordial disclosure of the human being in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, Heidegger does not aim to find a way of navigating the tragic movement of *techne*. Rather, he aims to accelerate its arrival. The present times do not constitute what Nietzsche called a “tragic culture,” and this is precisely the problem. If the finitude of beings only comes to light when nature pushes back against human *techne*, the solution is to commune with nature, to engage in creative, violent *techne* in order to draw the differential character of nature into appearance. This solution is at once political and epistemic; Heidegger insists that there can be no separation between the two if technologized thinking is to be overcome.

Heidegger no longer considers his vocation in terms of political confrontation as he did in his Rector’s Address but identifies his calling as the central link in a threefold chain. This is particularly evident in his lectures on Hölderlin’s *Germanian* (1934–1935), given in the same academic year as *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Here he argues that while “the truth of the existence of a people, is originally founded by the poet,” it must be “grasped and ordered, and so first opened up as being by the thinker.”²⁴ Yet to become the “definite historical truth” so that the hearers might become a “people” we require a further link, “the creation of the state by . . . the state-creator.”²⁵ The poet ruptures the established field of meaning, the philosopher carefully explains the profundity of the work, and the politician institutes the new epoch. Heidegger’s goal is no longer to organize the self-assertion of a nation against a configuration of political meaning. Rather, it is to transform the “problem of politics” into a task of unveiling the origin of the political as such: a philosophical task of *techne*, of transgressive knowing.²⁶

On one level, it seems that Heidegger abandons the Platonic kind of metapolitics he mentioned in *Black Notebooks* in favor of a new account of thinking. Setting the work of the poet as the origin of political change is, in one sense, a radically anti-Platonic move. Not only does it return the poet from exile, but it also places him at the center of the *polis* in the role

of the philosopher-king.²⁷ However, in another sense Heidegger's prioritization of poetry replicates Plato's logic. Heidegger effectively argues that in a phenomenal (tragic) world Plato's philosopher-king *must* be a poet—just not an “unknowing” poet who, like Ion, is not attuned to the essence of Being but merely replicates the great art of times past in order to impress an audience. To this extent Heidegger's approach remains metapolitical to the extent that it relegates the realm of practical decision-making to a sphere that is subordinate to thinking. By identifying the poet as the founder of the state, Heidegger does not challenge the subordinate position of politics to other modes of presentation. Rather, he substitutes the hegemony of philosophy over politics that we find in his metapolitical approach with a new hegemony: the hegemony of the poetic over politics. This move frames the *polis* not in terms of *praxis*, that is, action aimed toward the good of the *polis*, but in terms of poetry, of *poiesis*. For Heidegger, *poiesis* is not a form of activity that creates the symbolic field within the aesthetic sphere, but of production; it is concerned with the bringing-forth of Being into appearance. Heidegger's goal is to aestheticize politics, identifying the political sphere (that, for Plato, must be governed by the philosophic) and the aesthetic sphere (which is free from the philosophic) as one and the same order. Thus the *polis* is not a creative achievement that forms the site of political action but a work of production that opens our attention to the movement of history: “Unconcealment happens only in so far as it is brought about by the work: the work of the world as poetry, the work of stone in temple and statue, the work of *polis* as the site of history that grounds and preserves all this” (*IM* 204).²⁸ Heidegger concludes that the activity proper to the *polis*—and thus to history—is not *praxis*, the mode of activity that Aristotle describes as that which directs itself to the life of the *polis* according to *phronesis*.²⁹ Rather, it is *poiesis*, bringing-forth through the creation of works. The work does not orient the people to the public activity of communication but to a shared attention to Being.

Heidegger's notion of *poiesis* connotes an epistemological access to a pre-given meaning rather than a communicative action that is an end in itself. The original moment of language, the opening of the temple, and the creation of the *polis* are poetic “works” that schematize an outlook for humans to understand themselves and the world: language schematizes thought, the temple is a schema of transcendence, and the *polis* is a schema of appearance. *Techné* is thus “the setting-into-work of Being, a setting-into-work which is itself knowing. This is History” (*IM* 130). Heidegger's notion of history is not the domain of creation but the unveiling of Being. Preplatonic thought

serves Heidegger well for this task, for it lacks the concern for agency and the ethical sphere that we find in Plato and Aristotle.

Ultimately, Heidegger identifies the power of Sophocles' choral ode to cast us out of the familiar and throw us into the radical questioning of everything that appears in the *polis*. The "authentic task" bequeathed to us by tragedy lies in "what we do not know; and insofar as we know this *genuinely*—namely, as a given task—we always know it only in *questioning*. Being able to question means being able to wait, even for a lifetime. . . . what is essential is . . . the right endurance" (*IM* 221). Poetic knowing involves acknowledging the failure of technologized thinking and is expressed in questioning and waiting. This kind of knowing does not take the form of the transgressive science of the Rector's Address but rather anticipates the appearance of a pre-given meaning.

Hölderlin's Hymn

In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Greek tragedy exemplified an alternative kind of *techne* to Western technology, one that maintains the poetic dimension of human knowing. Heidegger's project was to listen to spirit, to allow the original presentation of human *techne* to transform the present technologized mode of engaging with nature. In his 1942 lecture series on Hölderlin's hymnal poem "The Ister," Heidegger develops an alternative method of listening to spirit. Here he examines tragedy as the original moment that gives rise to the ontohistorical destiny of a people, one that must be reproduced in order to respond to the crisis of the modern times. In these lectures Heidegger expands on the account of *techne* he gave in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, providing his most sustained treatment of Greek tragedy. His understanding of tragedy, however, is by no means the same. Robert Bernasconi suggests that what distinguishes these lectures from *Introduction to Metaphysics* is that Heidegger speaks from a position of "political isolation."³⁰ In *Hölderlin's Hymn*, "a space open[s] up between the thinker and the people," which reflects Heidegger's recognition that he was unable to determine "the direction of the Nazi Party."³¹ Here, his project is no longer to recall the National Socialist regime to its inner truth and greatness, but to show that the party has propagated the Western obsession with technology and become complicit with the world-historical abandonment of Being. While Heidegger is clearly more critical of National Socialism in this lecture series than he was in 1935, I will suggest that his attempt

to frame his critique entirely in terms of the abandonment of Being fails to counteract it.

Heidegger begins his lecture series on Hölderlin's hymn by arguing that the National Socialist Party, as it stands in 1942, is unable to overcome the technical thinking that (in his understanding) it set out to combat. He does not criticize politicians or policies, however, but locates the failure of the party in the "research" of German academics (HH 80). He argues that this research does not submit to the uncertainty of Being but, instead, finds its measure in the "surveyability and indubitability of everything that can be calculated and planned" (HH 94). The failure of the Nazi academics to submit to the uncertainty of Being is premised on their assumption that thinking, if it is to discern the truth, "only needed to be liberated from the 'poetic'" (HH 111–112). Such an assumption overlooks the fact that thinking has a historical origin and does not simply "exist," cleaving a divide between the clarity of thinking and the confusion of poetizing.

Because the calculative research of the Nazi academics lies in their rejection of the historical dimension of thinking, Heidegger proposes to counteract the divide between thinking and poetizing by returning to the historical origins of thinking. Ultimately, his goal is to return to the choral ode of *Antigone*. Yet this process is not as straightforward as it was in *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Heidegger no longer returns directly to the Presocratic Greeks. Instead, he proposes a less assertive route that opens our thinking to transformation by reflecting "on the essence of history" (HH 54). To undertake this task, Heidegger turns to Hölderlin's "The Ister," a poem that describes the journeying of the Danube River in search for a "place" (*Ort*) of dwelling, a homeland (*Heimat*), "one's own" (*das Eigene*), or in Hölderlin's language, a "Fatherland" (*Vaterland*), exploring the flow of the river that connects Germany to the "oriental vitality" of ancient Greece (HH 2–6). Hölderlin is able to "poetize the historicity of human beings" (HH 53), for he undertook a "poetic dialogue" with the commencement of Greek poetizing, that is, with the "choral song from the *Antigone* of Sophocles" (HH 55). Heidegger notes that if we turn to the choral ode without Hölderlin's help—as he tried in *Introduction to Metaphysics*—then we face a problem, for our "modern thought is much too 'intellectual,' that is, much too calculative and technical in its planning, to penetrate immediately into the realm of the Greeks, let alone to be entirely 'at home' there in" (HH 55). Hölderlin's poetry resists this kind of thinking, for he considers the essence of history in human beings "becoming homely . . . through an encounter with the foreign" (HH 54). The task facing the German people,

then, is not to assume an immediate relation to the Greeks but to journey with Hölderlin through the foreign (the Greek world) so that they might become homely within it. This journey must go through the choral ode of *Antigone*, which presents the experience of what it is like to live in a world that is bigger than we can understand.

To join Hölderlin on this journey, Heidegger reflects on three different determinations of human being poetized by Sophocles in the choral ode. The first determination, that which constitutes “the essential ground of this tragedy” (HH 60), is the determination of human beings as *deinon*. Heidegger begins with a definition of *deinon* that is similar to that in *Introduction to Metaphysics*: *deinon* names the uncanny, “that which is not at home, not homely in that which is homely” (HH 71). Yet he then qualifies this definition: “Uncanniness does not first arise as a consequence of humankind; rather, humankind emerges from uncanniness and remains within it—looms out of it and stirs within it” (HH 72). In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, the uncanny was a profound description of the creature who, in search of a home, uses transgressive creativity, which renders itself unhomely. In *Hölderlin’s Hymn*, Heidegger identifies the uncanny as a “fundamental kind of essence” (HH 72) that belongs to human beings. While the powers of nature are “sublime” in that they “demand awe” and “compel our astonishment” (HH 76), the uncanniness that gives sublimity its power lies solely in the human being, leading us back to wonderment at what kind of being the human is. The uncanny is “that which presences and at the same time absences,” determining human beings to have a counterturning essence. While Being allows beings to appear for humans, Being is not a being and is lost in human activity. Thus it can be said that Being determines human beings to forget Being; it is *natural* for human beings to be outside Being, lost and without a way.

The second determination of human being Heidegger explores in the choral ode in the middle part of the second strophe (l. 360), *pantoporos aporos*, which he translates as “venturing forth in all directions—without experience” (HH 74). According to Heidegger, this determination captures the nature of human creativity whereby the very attempt to make our world our home is that which makes us unhomely (*Unheimlich*). He states that *poros* connotes an “irruption of autonomous power” (HH 75) expressed in the profound ability of human beings to build shelters for themselves and to domesticate wild animals. Yet it is this very power that leaves them *aporos*, without experience, for they cannot transform their experience into self-understanding. All the technical expertise that human beings attain merely

drives them to go further in each pursuit, but none of these skills manifest the propensity for bringing human beings into what is by essence their own.

The supreme example of this determination of human beings is their inability to come to terms with their own finitude. Heidegger notes that no “skillfulness,” “acts of violence,” or “artfulness” can “stave off death” (*HH* 75), for there is no *techne* that is able to domesticate our essence. Death is not some state of affairs that can be circumvented, nor does it “come to” human beings from without. Indeed, the great danger that faces human beings is not a problem that needs a solution. Rather, Heidegger argues that the danger is an ontological condition that requires our understanding of Being to be transformed.³² Heidegger explains this danger in his essay “What Are Poets For?” a few years later in a similar way: “What threatens man in his very nature is the willed view that man, by the peaceful release, transformation, storage, and channeling of the energies of physical nature, could render the human condition, man’s being, tolerable for everybody and happy in all respects.”³³ The fundamental threat to humanity is not the fact that we will die. Rather, it is our tendency to fool ourselves into thinking that some kind of skill can stave off death. If the problem is technically framed then all is hopeless, for death cannot be conquered. Yet if our understanding of Being is transformed, we discover that death is not something to be escaped, but that the “being of humans in itself proceeds towards its death” (*HH* 76). To find a home in our essence, death must be embraced as our ownmost possibility.

Heidegger claims that what is “tragic” about the ancient Greek world is that the Greeks attained “the pinnacle of its essence at that very point where it preserves and brings to appear the counterturning in being itself” (*HH* 77). In other words, it was the propensity of the Greeks to allow the *deinon* in its counterturning essence to come into appearance that constitutes the greatness of the Greek world. The implication of Heidegger’s argument is that the actual achievements made in the political sphere are mere occasions for the *deinon* nature of human beings to appear. In the same way, the suffering of Antigone provides a “poetic determination” of human being, allowing death, the counterturning essence, and the uncanny nature of all human endeavors to appear at the heart of collective life (*HH* 77). In the drama of *Antigone*, the essence of the *deinon* is “enunciated in its completeness by Sophocles for the first time—but also for the last time—thus extends back into the realms that, in a concealed manner, sustain our own history” (*HH* 77). After this momentary greatness, the metaphysics that begins with Plato is “not up to the essence of the ‘negative,’” for it seeks to make the essence

of humankind as rational beings fully present to philosophical analysis. By arguing that we inherit this inability to grasp the negative dimensions of our being, Heidegger denies any saving potential in politics. We cannot save ourselves, for we are all tied to the same fate. Salvation lies only in retrieving a primordial attunement to the counterturning essence of Being.

The third determination of human being Heidegger notes is the middle part of the second antistrophe (ll. 370–371), *hupsipolis apolis*, which he translates as “towering high above the site—for feiting the site” (HH 79). Heidegger frames the technical understanding of the *polis* as the great error of National Socialism. This third determination poetizes the movement that humans undergo whereby their aspirations to political greatness—the creation of laws and cities that Sophocles praises in the ode—inevitably throws them out of the city, making them *apolis*, without a site. Here we come closest to any explicit attempt to confront any political agents who are part of the Nazi regime. Heidegger is quick to note that this determination cannot be articulated in terms of good and evil or even in some kind of error or of judgment, for it precedes any ethical determination. Rather, it shows that evil means that something is “essential to being itself” (HH 78). What is important to note is that Heidegger no longer considers the *polis* as a work of human transgressive action—or “great” *technē*—for it is “the essence of the polis to thrust one into excess and to tear one into downfall” (HH 86). He claims that what we find in *Antigone* as evil is essential to being, for the essence of the *polis* is to make Creon *apolis*. The Nazi politicians fail National Socialism by attempting to render “the political realm calculable and indubitable so that they can ‘plan and act’” (HH 94). Under their rule, the political sphere becomes that which is without question, thereby occluding the possibility of evil appearing in their own action. In this sense Heidegger’s critique of the technalized political thinking of the National Socialists—at least in the sense of political control—aims to undermine any kind of political sphere in which Nazism, understood as the dictatorship of the political sphere according to nonpolitical ideology, is possible. In contrast, the Greeks of Sophocles’ time considered the *polis* as that which cannot be controlled but is always worthy of question, opening an ontological space that necessarily resists totalitarian thinking.

However, while Heidegger attacks National Socialism in a way that undermines any attempt to frame the political sphere in technalized terms, his response does not provide an alternative to totalitarianism. He aims to open an *ontological* space that resists technical control but refuses to cast this space in terms of politics. This is particularly apparent in his inter-

pretation of Sophocles' *Antigone*. In Heidegger's reading, Antigone is the heroine of the play, for she poetizes the three determinations of human being: *deinon*, *pantoporos aporos*, and *hupsipolis apolis*. Heidegger no longer understands the one who "weds himself to inhumanity thanks to reckless daring" as Creon, the violent state-creator (and hence as Hitler), as he did in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, but as Antigone.³⁴ Antigone takes the path that appears before her as destiny, something that no one knows has arisen except herself (*HH* 103). She embodies the true path of humanity, for she does not remain entangled in subjectivity but understands her own being as uncanny. Thus she takes it upon herself to become homely within her essence (*HH* 117). In this sense she "is the poem of becoming homely in being unhomely" (*HH* 121).

The great difference between *Introduction to Metaphysics* and *Hölderlin's Hymn* lies in the disappearance of Heidegger's search for an assertive kind of *techné* capable of counteracting the world-historical movement of technology. In *Hölderlin's Hymn*, Heidegger no longer presents the unhomely as the world of apparent meanings created by human beings. Rather, he presents the unhomely as "nothing that human beings themselves make but rather the converse: something that makes them into what they are and who they can be" (*HH* 103). There is something within the homely that speaks to humans, calling them forth toward the opening of Being. This is where humans must make their home: within their counterturning essence, within what Hölderlin describes as the arable land of the river. In this way we find that the voice of Being does not call humanity to become the authentic agent of its own history, but precisely the opposite: humanity's calling is to recognize *Being* as the center of narrative agency.

It is clear that between *Introduction to Metaphysics* and *Hölderlin's Hymn* Heidegger alters his response to the technologized political thinking of the National Socialists. In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, the artist was seen as the creative agent exemplified by Sophocles, who took a transgressive stance toward the metaphysics that held inherited meaning in place in order to give a new rule to art. The task of the philosopher (Heidegger) was to direct the political leader in the same creative exercise of *techné* in order to allow the true nature of *techné* to rupture the falsehood of technology. In *Hölderlin's Hymn*, it is not the poet who confronts a historical epoch, and hence it is not the role of the politician to repeat it. Rather, it is the artwork that presents the confrontation, orientating the spectators toward the *polis* as the site of appearance.³⁵ Sophocles does not stand as an exemplary thinker who confronts determinist forms of thinking in his own time to cleave open the

political sphere to creative transformation; this interpretation would place human *techné* at the center of historical turning. Rather, Heidegger argues that it is Sophocles' patient listening to Being, which he expresses in the character of Antigone, that depicts what it looks like to act in a manner that is fitting with our historical endowment. In short, Heidegger radicalizes the kind of waiting required to "confront" technalized thinking, opening up his distinction between acting and letting be.

In his lecture course on Hölderlin's poetry Heidegger insightfully questions conventional forms of politics, for those forms of politics assume that providing a technical solution to tragedy could solve the problems of humanity. He also provides a provocative characterization of our condition as uncanny, thereby suggesting that our task is not to escape our condition but to find a home within it. However, his philosophy faces a particular problem when he argues that the truth of our nature is tragic, that rather than seeking to remedy the human condition through conventional forms of politics, the German people must journey through the foreign in order to allow the counterturning nature of the *polis* to appear. His solution is ultimately to strip the political sphere of agency, for he comes to view an agent-centered conception of history as an expression of the technalized thinking of Western metaphysics that is assured of the ability of *techné* to heal the wounds of humanity. Even the poet is devoid of agency; his poetic character is expressed in his ability to let Being be, thereby orienting the people toward a passive contemplation of the political sphere. Tragedy, in this view, does not emanate from an error or a grand mistake. It is rather the presentation of preexisting meaning, namely, the essence of human life. Heidegger does not search for a middle way between acting and letting be. There is either violence or patient endurance, for the task of finding a home within the uncanny belongs to the poetic, to Being.

Tragedy and Being

In order to assess whether *Introduction to Metaphysics* and *Hölderlin's Hymn* constitute a genuine "confrontation" with National Socialism, I now turn to Jaspers' response to Heidegger in *Tragedy Is Not Enough*, a book published shortly after his correspondence with Heidegger. It is vital to preface this analysis, however, by returning to two important dimensions of Heidegger's lectures. The first is that both lecture series provide an insightful critique of the technalized thinking implicit to modern politics. Opposed to the tech-

nical understanding of the political sphere exhibited by the leaders of the National Socialist Party, Heidegger attempts to unearth the poetic dimensions of the political sphere in the search for a way of thinking large enough to allow the differential character of human beings to come into appearance. The second is that the political realm of human *praxis* is secondary to this poetic realm of appearances. Heidegger argues that the true content of tragedy is not human actions, judgment, or the outward being of human thought in the public sphere. Rather, it is the movement of Being. In this sense, Being is tragic. In *Tragedy Is Not Enough*, Jaspers seeks to highlight the danger of Heidegger's attempt to equate politics with *poiesis*, that is, with philosophy. He argues that by considering tragedy as the expression of a mode of knowing that is capable of accessing pure being, Heidegger drastically overestimates the capacities of philosophy. Against Heidegger, Jaspers argues that tragedy presents the split character of being, opening a way of thinking that is aware of the limits of individual speculation—the limits of philosophy—and clears the way for politics.

In *Tragedy Is Not Enough*, Jaspers affirms several dimensions of Heidegger's search for a Platonic notion of *techne* in Greek tragedy. Like Heidegger, he asserts that tragedy "depicts a man in his greatness beyond good and evil" (*TNE* 56), opening us to an understanding of human action that has no guarantees of success. Jaspers recognizes that this insight is made possible by a kind of knowledge that does not come from "achieving a harmonious interpretation of the universe and actually living in accord with it," that is, from finding a "home" in this world (*TNE* 32). Rather, it comes from discovering the limits of our power in the attempt to build this home. Thus when the tragic sense appears, "something extraordinary is lost: the feeling of security without the shadow of tragedy" (*TNE* 33). Tragic knowledge arises whenever the feeling of security vanishes, that is, whenever our awareness exceeds our power to act.

While Jaspers identifies tragedy with the differential nature of truth in a similar way to Heidegger, he argues that Heidegger's attempt to unveil a primordial sense of truth as appearance ultimately aims to *overcome* truth's differential character. Tragedy does not present the differential character of truth through a mode of presentation that operates without technical legislation. Rather, Jaspers employs a partly Hegelian framework in order to suggest that the differential character of truth comes into appearance "wherever the powers that collide are truly independently of each other" (*TNE* 57). In this portrayal, there is no deeper truth underpinning the anthropic sphere, for the collision exists between the *bearers* of truth, not

the powers themselves. Of “genuine tragedy,” Jaspers states, “one can speak only with reference to man” (*TNE* 94). The human dimension of tragedy can be identified on two levels. The first is that human life itself—all activity and success—is “doomed finally to suffer shipwreck.” While death and suffering might be veiled from sight, “in the end they engulf all.” The second level is that the public sphere, in which the powers are contested, is dependent on the plurality of human perspectives. Because there is no undergirding essence to the public sphere, “reality is divided against itself” (*TNE* 95). Tragedy is real because irreconcilable opposition is real. Truth must defend its rightful claim not only against injustice but also against the rightful claims of other truths. Thus we *must* maintain a language of guilt if we are to meaningfully speak of agency. Jaspers asserts that every “mortal imperative” is “tainted by guilt, for it must destroy others equally moral and equally imperative” (*TNE* 95).

By prioritizing the human dimension of tragedy, Jaspers rejects Heidegger’s ontological difference between beings and Being. In this sense he casts Heidegger’s ontological project as an explicit attempt to flee from tragedy to the safe confines of thinking. This attempt is particularly evident in Heidegger’s reading of *Antigone*, which does not consider the drama as a whole but turns to the choral ode as a separate work of poetry. Read in the context of Sophocles’ overall plot, the choral ode cannot be understood to praise the one who “weds himself to inhumanity thanks to reckless daring.” Rather, it condemns such an act of daring, which, in the context of the drama, is manifest in Creon’s unswerving conviction to execute anyone who might attempt to bury Polynices. In the efforts to read *Antigone* without Aristotle’s separation of *techne* from *poiesis*—and thus without the aid of Aristotle’s reversal-recognition account of tragedy—Heidegger reads the drama as an appraisal of the daring one, which, given the setting in which Heidegger wrote *Introduction to Metaphysics*, can be read as nothing less than an appraisal of Hitler.

Jaspers’ reading of tragedy in terms of action shows us that, from an Aristotelian point of view, there is nothing “tragic” about Heidegger’s view of tragedy. Aristotelian tragedy is intrinsically undesirable. It is a self-induced fate based on one’s inability to understand what one is doing. Heideggerian tragedy, on the other hand, draws the failure of technologized knowledge into appearance. As opposed to the National Socialists who construe the political realm as “calculable and indubitable so that they can plan and act,” Heidegger’s solution draws from tragedy in order to propose a strategy of radical questioning and waiting. This passive response attempts to see through the

tragedy of *techne* to the movement of Being, allowing the one attuned to the tragedy of Being to rise above the mere preoccupation with beings that dominates modern politics. The task of confronting the prevailing order is one of *poiesis*, of thinking, of philosophy. Tragedy is not something to be avoided but to be affirmed and drawn into appearance without regard for those who suffer in the process.

In opposition to Heidegger, Jaspers argues that tragedy does belong to ontology but to what he calls “the foreground” (*TNE* 104). This is to say that the awareness of tragedy is not monopolized by Sophocles’ choral ode, for it can arise in the midst of any situation in which two human beings come into discursive contact. All human conversation possesses the ability to open us to tragedy, not because conversation is ontologically “tragic,” but because it can become an occasion in which we encounter the split, perspectival nature of truth. Jaspers claims that if tragedy expresses a kind of knowledge that does not arise from an encounter with Being but from the experience of the split nature of truth, then it belongs “neither in the realm of transcendence nor in the Basis of all Being, but in the world of sense and time” (*TNE* 104). In other words, tragedy belongs in the world of representation. If we mistake tragedy with Being, we are faced with a choice between inauthenticity or lurid grandeur: to “live and err, or to grasp truth and die of it” (*TNE* 24). This formulation of our predicament is apparent in Heidegger’s recommendation for the people to support the transgressive violence of the state-maker in *Introduction to Metaphysics* or to remain faithful to their calling to death in *Hölderlin’s Hymn*. If we place tragedy in the foreground, however, as a representation that elucidates the limits of human power and our inability to live up to our promise, then we are released from this “rigid either-or” and are able to acknowledge that “truth, whole and complete . . . is not available for us in life and time.” The experience of tragedy in space and time displaces us from the project of accessing pure being—from Heidegger’s project—and remains in the realm of representation. It opens us to the task of thinking that acknowledges that “within time, truth is forever underway, always in motion and not final even in its most marvelous crystallizations” (*TNE* 104).

While the failure of *Introduction to Metaphysics* to become instrumental in the political project of National Socialism might have opened Heidegger to the awareness of the limits of philosophy, the opposite is the case. Heidegger’s notion of the ontological difference allows him to ascribe the human dimension of tragedy to the realm of beings, leading him to search for the movement of tragedy that is primary to the collision of human truths. In

this formulation, the task is not to acknowledge the tragic nature of truth and thus to find ways of navigating the divided nature of the world. Rather, it is to transform our ontological conditions that render the political sphere as a calculable domain in which we can plan and act, opening us to a conception of history as a realm that sets humans on their way. On one side, this proposal breaks from Hegel's speculative approach to history. Yet on the other side, as Hannah Arendt notes, Heidegger reproduces Hegel's notion of history that occludes the centrality of human action from historical events.³⁶ Arendt argues that while Heidegger radically questions the nature of temporality, the "eternal questions of politics are forgotten."³⁷ Jaspers makes a similar claim, arguing that Heidegger's attempt to denigrate action to a mode of production is nothing other than a denial of tragedy. Rather than moving us to sympathy for those subject to the misery of human tragedy, Heidegger's identification of Being and tragedy "lifts us above reality" (or reveals a layer beneath it) and allows the tragic philosopher to live "in an aura of grandeur" (*TNE* 99).

Jaspers does not view Heidegger's interpretation of tragedy as a simple misreading; rather, he claims that it constitutes a dangerous position of philosophical isolation. By refusing to engage in the world of beings—the divided political realm where all truth is under way—Heidegger soars in reflective grandeur while "man presses for redemption from his terrible realities, which lack the glamour of tragedy" (*TNE* 100).³⁸ The irony is that tragedy properly understood does not allow for such soaring, for "it achieves no comprehensive interpretation of the world." Tragedy does not free us from the shackles of Western subjectivity by showing us that death is for us an abstract *possibility*; it shows us a *particular* corpse, one that is not a possibility but that roots and smells and tears us from the glamour of philosophy to the trauma of lived human experience. Tragedy shocks and grounds us, transforming the practice of philosophy from individual speculation to a way of thinking that is adequate to the political arena in which truth is under way.

Jaspers claims that when we grasp the particularity of tragedy, we are opened to a tragic kind of knowledge. This knowledge does not take us beneath the failure of technologized thinking. Instead, it "accepts danger and that inescapable nexus of guilt and doom implicit in all true action and accomplishment in the real world" (*TNE* 96). To experience tragedy is not simply to recognize the counterturning essence of human beings but to choose to act in light of this recognition. In this sense, tragedy not only displaces us from the task of instructing the political sphere according to

philosophically defined ends but also from instructing politics according to *poetically* defined ends—from keeping pure from political engagement. Tragedy clears a space for *politics*, for legislating and judging in a realm that is held in common.

Jaspers shows us that Heidegger's lectures on tragedy cannot be said to express a "confrontation" with National Socialism, for they are not framed as a work of human action in the context of a community. Confrontation, Jaspers explains in *Philosophy*, involves making claims on each other, meaning that it "begins with two."³⁹ It takes the form of a conversation—regardless of whether the other party chooses to respond or not—wherein one makes oneself vulnerable to one's conversation partner. In this sense Heidegger's philosophy is not capable of confrontation at all: it upholds individual thinking as the paradigm of philosophy and reduces the interpersonal domain of politics to a form of knowing.

In an interview with Ansgar Kemman concerning his relationship with Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer noted that great thinkers such as Heidegger find it difficult to submit to the preconditions of a conversation, for their ability to place their conversation partner within their own thinking is so great. Noting his students' "disappointment" with Heidegger's inability to converse, Gadamer states that "Heidegger never got beyond that stage, but it is also difficult when one has such a superior intellect. . . . For people like us, it is easier to notice that the other could also be correct."⁴⁰ These reflections assist us to see why Heidegger's interpretation of tragedy is deeply paradoxical: it provides, on the surface, an important diagnosis of the technical thinking that buffers us from being affected by the world. Yet this very diagnosis fails to identify a response, for it serves to elevate one's thinking over the activities of political life. Rainer Schürmann captures this paradox well, arguing that while Heidegger critiques the tendency of Western metaphysics to confuse the world for Being itself, he does not escape "the ultimacy that philosophers have pursued since Parmenides."⁴¹ Schürmann notes that Heidegger's intellectual power is tantamount to his political failure.

For Jaspers, *ad hominem* arguments like that raised by Gadamer are entirely appropriate when it comes to Heidegger's philosophy, for his philosophical response to political problems serves to elevate the thinker above tragedy in a state of philosophical grandeur. To separate the divided nature of beings from a more primordial concept of Being is to remove what is properly tragic from the anthropological level and to render it as an ontological problem, casting our ethical responsibilities as a shadow of

a deeper problem at hand. In a letter dated December 22, 1945, Jaspers offered his advice to the denazification committee overseeing Heidegger's intellectual career. On the one hand, he writes, Heidegger failed to grasp the dangerous intentions of the party's leadership. Yet on the other hand, like Alfred Baeumler and Carl Schmitt, Heidegger remained culpable for self-consciously assisting the National Socialist movement with his philosophy. Jaspers states that Baeumler, Schmitt, and Heidegger all "brought their very real intellectual abilities to the task, only to end up blackening the reputation of German philosophy." "So I agree with you," Jaspers concludes, "that there is a touch of the tragedy of evil about it all." ⁴²

Castoriadis

Tragedy and Self-formation

There is no way of eliminating the risks of collective hubris. Nobody can protect humanity from folly or suicide.

—Cornelius Castoriadis, “The Greek *Polis*
and the Creation of Democracy”

Ostensibly, Castoriadis’ understanding of tragedy shares several similarities with Heidegger’s in *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Like Heidegger, he considers tragedy a watershed moment in the development of Western thought. In particular, he turns to tragedy to find a language capable of examining the spheres of social and political life. Yet while Heidegger locates in the tragedies an original, receptive attunement to Being, Castoriadis approaches tragedy as an active, representational form of thinking. He deems that Heidegger’s reading of tragedy as a means to go beneath representation merely continues the Western obsession with pure being, and instead he examines tragedy as a form of representation that confronts our attempt to stabilize ontology with a philosophical discourse governed by the ideal of univocality. Tragedy does not simply disrupt philosophical thinking, for Castoriadis; it also opens philosophy to the polyvalent dynamism of living things.

Castoriadis identifies the significance of tragedy’s disruptive form in its ability to confront the mode of thinking basic to the Western philosophical tradition, namely, the thinking of being as “being something determined” (IIS 221). To understand being as something determined is the effort to identify ontology with human signification, an effort that ultimately attempts to connect intellectual questions with what is taken to be “real.” In the intellectual environment of France during the 1960s to

1980s, Castoriadis intended his critique of determinism to confront several intellectual movements that fashioned themselves as alternatives to traditional philosophy, such as Marxism and structuralism. Far from escaping the determinist thinking of the philosophical tradition, Castoriadis argues that both Marxism and structuralism share a commitment to “identity logic,” a way of understanding the relation between thought and Being that makes it possible to explain society and history through reference to an underlying logic (*IIS* 171). Such thinking occludes the singularity of appearances and fashions itself in terms of ontology, becoming an avatar of deeper tendencies in Western thought that cover over all creative being.¹

In this chapter I draw from Castoriadis’ work to show that tragedy can be understood as part of the same historical project as philosophy. For Castoriadis, tragedy expresses a distinctly philosophical enterprise aimed at problematizing inherited ideas and recasting them in terms of unrealized projects. The significance of Castoriadis’ approach to the present study is that it connects Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* with the insights that the tragedians have to bear on human thinking, thus providing an alternative to the Idealist and Nietzschean views, both of which limit the importance of tragedy to a specific crisis. Castoriadis employs the form of tragedy as an explicit problematic in order to continue the expansive project articulated in—though not limited to—Kant’s conception of philosophy as a second-order enquiry whose task is to make explicit the formal conditions of knowledge. This project begins with the acknowledgment of the failure of philosophical systems that examine being as determinacy, transforming the aspiration of philosophy from the univocal language of being to a process of making sense in common.

Identity logic

Building on Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, Castoriadis turns to tragedy to confront modes of philosophy that seek to determine all knowledge in the paradigm of *techné*. He identifies Aristotle and Kant as guides in this task, for they both provide enduring accounts of judgments of determinants. What interests Castoriadis about the attempts made by Aristotle and Kant to mark out the limits of determinant judgments is that, through these attempts, both thinkers discovered the need for an alternative paradigm of judgment that can operate in underdetermined contexts. In order to show how this paradigm of judgment could remain open to singular appear-

ances and yet constitute a reasoned way of proceeding, Aristotle and Kant identify a symbolic dimension to human thought that is able to create a "second" nature, an order of "nonbeing," that is beyond reference to the existing. Castoriadis argues that the discovery of the self-forming capacity of thought involves an insight similar to the tragedies. Like Aristotle and Kant, the tragedies disrupt our attempt to determine all knowledge according to preestablished ends, opening us to a new task of sense-making that is not limited to the existing.

Before examining the connection Castoriadis draws between Aristotle and Kant's identification of a productive dimension of thought and the Greek tragedies, it is necessary to identify why he deems this connection to be important. In his major work, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Castoriadis argues that "Greco-Western thought," that is, thinking understood as an explicit institution in Western history, has systematically attempted to seal the priority of the determinant use of judgment over the capacity of imagination to create new, and hence contingent, form. He states that such philosophy "has constituted, developed, amplified and refined itself on the basis of this thesis: being is being something determined (*einai ti*), speaking is saying something determined (*ti legein*)" (IIS 221). This view of being entails that "speaking the truth is determining speaking" and that both "speaking the truth" and "determining speaking" are "one and the same" (IIS 221).

Castoriadis describes this model of thinking as "identitary logic," for it expresses a system of logical relations that ascribe identity to both individual objects and to collections of objects in ensembled sets. Identitary logic explains the world according to causation, finality, motivation, function, and structure by identifying the necessary and sufficient conditions of appearances. It is manifest in the fact that mathematics has offered the only available model of a true demonstration in the form of a "sufficient determination of what is said in its necessity" (IIS 222). By fashioning the ideal of determinant thinking in terms of mathematics, identitary logic constitutes a technical model of thinking that legislates nature according to a demand for completeness, denigrating the nonmathematical, contingent strata of living things to a realm that is less-than-being.

Echoing Nietzsche's understanding of the pulsating trajectory of the Apollinian drive for completeness, Castoriadis suggests that identitary logic's interest in systematic understanding means that it is well suited to stumble across its own limits. He elucidates this dynamic through reference to the development of set-theory at the end of the nineteenth century, giving

particular attention to the work of Georg Cantor. While Cantor's original proposal is now called "naive" set-theory due to Bertrand Russell's critique of its internal paradoxes, Castoriadis argues that the paradoxical character of Cantor's proposal is vital to its success. Cantor's theory responds to the question of the foundation of mathematics. Because it refuses to identify this foundation in a presupposed logical stratum, it "exhibits the indefinable within the definition of the definite, the ineliminable circularity within every attempt at a foundation."² The circularity of Cantor's theory is particularly evident in his definition of the set as "a collection into a whole of definite and distinct objects for our intuition or of our thought. These objects are called the elements of the set."³ What is significant about this definition—what makes it more philosophically important than Russell's critique or later developments in category theory⁴—is that it rejects previous attempts to derive the theory axiomatically and, instead, *accepts* its circular and undefinable terms.⁵

By accepting the circular nature of his definition, Cantor's set-theory draws our attention to several elements that it presupposes. First, his definition clearly presupposes that one must be able to distinguish between objects. These objects belong to the sphere of perception, or to representation, and must be posited as definable. Second, it openly presumes the existence of a schema for both separation and union. Only with such schemata can objects be posited as both distinct and as being assembled into a whole. Because Cantor's definition makes it clear that the application of these schemata is premised on our presupposing their existence, it reveals that they have no *logical* support. Rather, one simply presumes that they have already been applied before we apply them. In Castoriadis' words, one presumes that "each of the terms collected together in this way to form a whole has already been implicitly posited as collected together into this whole which it itself is, that the diversity of features defining it and distinguishing it . . . has been united in order to posit/form/be *this* very object" (*IIS* 224). Cantor's definition of the operation of numerical sets opens the question of "the justification" of their "starting point," "implying, therefore, that this [starting point] is external to the discourse at hand and that it is posited from somewhere else." Castoriadis concludes that Cantor "explodes" the search of justification by unveiling the groundlessness implicit in all logical systems (*IIS* 222).⁶

Castoriadis' notion of the groundlessness of logical systems—and his appraisal of naive set-theory—has faced two significant objections. Some scholars have argued that the notion of groundlessness entails a form of

voluntarism, for it denies any friction between formal categories and nature.⁷ Others claim that it shifts his philosophy into the sphere of psychology, for it implies that epistemic claims do not bear necessity but are rather psychical and social forms of self-expression.⁸ While the essayistic form of Castoriadis' writing at times lends itself to such objections, an account of concept acquisition can be drawn from his work that resists both charges. The first thing to note is that Castoriadis does not turn to Cantor's set-theory to suggest that sets bear no relation to nature but rather to show that twentieth-century logic reopens Kant's elucidation of representational, schematic thought. In the same way that Kant's critical method assumes the existence of mental schemata without grounding their existence, set-theory reopens the Kantian problematic of representation. It entails that identity logic, the system of thinking in which mathematics provides the only available model of true determination, can only be formulated if and only if there exist sets in the sense that Cantor defined. Yet if sets exist in this sense, then we cannot posit their origin and the schemata that allow them to be applied in a logical sphere that is available to thought. Rather, we must accept that they are simply presumed whenever they are used. The application of sets presupposes that they have been applied before we use them, meaning that we experience sets as transcendently necessary to the extent that they precede our thinking them. To put it differently, each set only comes into being by virtue of being utilized. Thus the ground of our presuppositions—including mathematical systems—lies in their prior application; they are a practice of convention.⁹

The conventional status of sets does not entail that they are somehow arbitrary or disconnected from nature. What Castoriadis aims to establish is that some basic, normative claims do not suppose existing rules, and yet we are entitled to take a normative attitude to them. We can map out this account in four steps, each of which captures a different level of analysis:¹⁰

1. We form dispositions to associate this X with previous Xs, thereby constituting sets (empirical/psychological level).
2. We have anthropological and cultural constraints on the way our dispositions pick out objects and subsume them into sets (anthropological level).
3. When we form such a disposition, we take it that our disposition is as it ought to be (normative level).

4. To cash out (3), we require schemata rules and rules of inference (logical level).

(1) is a purely descriptive step that presents the impulse of human cognition to form ensembles. From both an empirical and psychological perspective this step is unproblematic. Step (2) identifies that the nature of these sets are constrained by the interests of human cognition and the way that these interests have been expressed symbolically in a particular social environment. For example, human cognition divides the physical environment and human behavior according to items and actions that allow the acquisition of energy sources that are appropriate to biological functions. The way that this need is expressed in a given society, however, is highly specific to the given environmental and cultural conditions. This step remains empirical; we are yet to account for the normative relation we have to our cognition other than through inclination or desire. Step (3) provides this vital move, capturing the normative dimension of empirical claims. When we form dispositions, we grant them the status “ought to be seen as”; we make a reflective appeal to our fellow judges that they too ought to judge in the same way as we do. In Kant’s analysis, this step lies before our application of rules, and yet it expresses an *a priori* that grounds our assumption of the similarity of our own cognitive faculties to those of our fellow judges (see *CJ* §21). Yet step (3) does not complete this account of concept acquisition, for we must cash out how our normative claim is to be used. To do so, we form schema rules, such as what can be designated as wholes and parts, and rules of inference, encompassing what kinds of relation the schemata can be situated within. This is step (4).

Several recent scholars have identified the “primitive claim” to normativity noted in step (3) in Kant’s account of judgments of beauty.¹¹ These scholars suggest that the beautiful opens us to a claim that comes not from the preestablished categories of the understanding but from the imagination itself, and it is grounded on the feeling of vitality we experience when we are overwhelmed by a natural sphere that appears as hospitable to our epistemic endeavors. In other words, it is grounded biologically in the experience of ourselves as living beings. The mutual communicability of our *noninterested* aesthetic experience expresses a primitive claim that does not determine an object but that demands consent from the entire sphere of those who judge. Such accounts are close to Castoriadis’ work. However, in Castoriadis’ view the origin of this normative claim is not the primary problem; the normative claim exists, and cognition is only possible on the ground that

we presuppose its existence. The primary problem lies in how we become reflectively aware of the cognitive process and thus delimit our tendency to construct the epistemic project in the form of individual speculation to a collective task of knowing in common. Castoriadis claims that becoming aware of the corporate dimension of the normative *a priori* displaces us from individual speculation and opens us to cognition as a shared project of elucidating the natural order. We discover the need for fellow judges in order to make epistemic claims at all, opening us to our neighbors and their best possibilities. As we will see shortly, Castoriadis argues that the answer to the problem of how we become aware of this process lies in radical projects of self-reflection, such as that which we find in the Athenian cultural revolution. Such projects engender a germ of creative self-formation that inhabits every enterprise of inquiry.

In his analysis of Cantor's set-theory, Castoriadis seeks to show that the discovery of the groundlessness of our cognitive schemata alters our understanding of the relation between our faculty of representation (the imagination) and nature. It implies that logical systems that constitute step (4) do not find their basis *in* nature as a sure foundation. Instead, schematic rules and rules of inference are expressions of a creation—of an ontological genesis—“concerning what is and the manner in which it exists” (*IIS* 227). This level of creativity requires the human capacity to form a second stratum of nonbeing beyond our attachment to the existing. This is to say that nature does not cause our concepts or categories, meaning that we cannot analyze them without reference to the productivity of human cognition. Rather, the imagination, the productive faculty capable of cashing out schemata and inferential rules, causes our experience of nature. While this second stratum maps onto the first natural stratum, there is no *necessary* connection between the two. The first stratum is highly amenable to organization—in Castoriadis' words, it “can be effectively organized only if it is *organizable*”¹²—and yet there is no single way in which it might be organized. This is precisely what grounds step (3); it is on the primitive assumption that nature is organizable that we are able to grant our dispositions the status of “ought to be seen as.”

The absence of causality does not lead to skepticism. Castoriadis is deeply aware of the problem that John McDowell recently described in terms of the “frictionless” relation between the first and second strata. Drawing from Kant, McDowell insists that we have reason to assume that if human representational activity is spontaneous—if it is not caused by receptive impressions—then there *must* be some kind of receptivity or external

constraint, for there would be no other way to explain the order of the second stratum.¹³ It is precisely this “must” that grounds the normative claim in step (3), though it is only experienced reflectively. Castoriadis concurs, arguing that while the first natural stratum expresses organizable features—two and two stones make four stones, a bull and a cow produce calves and not chickens, and so on—the second stratum must recreate this dimension symbolically, seeing what is not there in what is. To differentiate a second stratum from the first does not entail that there is no friction between them, but rather that spontaneity comes first, that our receptivity to the natural is always synthesized through psychological and anthropological constraints. Thus the second stratum does not extend beyond the given in the form of a complete rupture. Rather, the second stratum extends the given; it is part of the given and creatively elaborates on it.¹⁴ While Castoriadis’ account is neo-Kantian, for it builds on Kant’s representational account of cognition as the enduring problem in philosophy,¹⁵ it is also neo-Aristotelian; Castoriadis maintains Aristotle’s language of first and second nature in order to avoid the need to determine how the second stratum maps onto the first. The primary task of knowledge is refashioned according to Aristotle’s account of *phronesis*, which constitutes an account of practical knowledge that does not subsume particular appearances under general, preestablished concepts, but that deals with singular instances in order to lead to the general. Because *phronesis* is attuned to singular instances, it is appropriate for living things such as the natural strata and human action. Yet it does not produce an object in a way that satisfies our conditions for objective knowledge. It is rather an end itself, for judging well is its own end. Thus it has an intrinsically social dimension, for our claim to reasoning well is always and already a claim to a community.

Imagination and representation

Castoriadis’ account of the ensembling nature of human cognition aims to demonstrate that philosophy always begins from the symbolic order of our second nature that we inherit as a living system of sets and relations. Because the symbolic order appears to us as a necessary and complete whole, philosophy features as a specific sociohistorical rupture that seeks to problematize its immediate appearance and to recast it as an ongoing project. Philosophy is an institution of human thinking that begins from the acknowledgment

that our grasp of nature involves a dynamic process of codetermination; it begins by limiting our cognitive aspirations to claims that are justifiable given the self-grounding edifice of (1)–(4). In order to show how philosophy has historically opened this task, Castoriadis turns to the neglected notion of the imagination.

Aristotle's *On the Soul* is one of the first texts to elaborate the notion of the imagination as *phantasia*. For Castoriadis, Aristotle's discovery of the imagination brings the same ensembling power of thought as expressed in Cantor's set-theory to philosophy's attention. Aristotle states that *phantasia* is an imitative, reproductive, combinatory power. While knowledge or intelligence "are never in error," *phantasia* is "that in virtue of which an image arises for us" and thus "can be false."¹⁶ This kind of imagination is not always present like sensation or thought but occurs when we recollect things that are not present. While Aristotle's definition of *phantasia* seems to be limited to representing what was already given, he suddenly introduces a second, different *phantasia*: "As sight is the most highly developed sense, the name *phantasia* (imagination) has been formed from *phaos* (light) because it is not possible to see without light."¹⁷ Without this fundamental kind of imagination, Aristotle observes that there can be no representative or conceptual thought at all, for it seems to precede thinking as such.

Despite the fundamental nature of this notion of imagination, Aristotle refers to it only in passing. It seems that he did not link *phantasia* with *poiesis*, that is, with the practical ability of humans to shape their environment. Thus the creative imagination Aristotle refers to is subordinate to imagination as reproduction, a mode of *techné* that "brings-forth" what was already there. Castoriadis suggests that while we find a glimmer of a productive kind of imagination in Aristotle's work, his refusal to connect *phantasia* with *poiesis* establishes the subsequent neglect of imagination in philosophical inquiry. Philosophy, from the start, has been understood as the search for the truth and has therefore neglected the contingent dimensions of thought.

Castoriadis' reading of Aristotle's *On the Soul* separates two kinds of imagination: reproductive and productive imagination.¹⁸ While the reproductive imagination represents what has already been seen, the productive imagination (only partially elucidated by Aristotle) produces something it has not yet seen, meaning that it is expressed symbolically. It produces a realm of nonbeing that extends the given. This realm is more fully articulated by Kant's elaboration of the productive, symbolic nature of the aesthetic sphere we find in *Critique of Judgment*. Kant proposes a productive

notion of imagination that expresses the ongoing need for a philosophical conception of mental images that transcend reality and are posited as projects.¹⁹ Yet Castoriadis suggests that Kant, like Aristotle, retreats from the radical implications that imagination might entail. Kant identifies the productive capacity of imagination to operate beyond the limits of the understanding only to separate this operation from his theoretical ontology. For Castoriadis, this separation entails that when he “sees in the work of art ‘produced’ by genius the undetermined and indeterminable positing of new determinations, there will still be an ‘instrumentality’ of a higher order, a subordination of the imagination to something else that allows one to gauge its works.” The presumption of a higher order hinders the radical insights of Kant’s third *Critique*, for the ontological status of the work of art remains “a reflection or a derivative of its value status, which consist in the presentation within intuition of the Ideas for which Reason cannot, in principle, furnish a discursive representation.”²⁰

Just as Aristotle’s primary imagination seems to underpin the operation of the reproductive imagination, Castoriadis argues that Kant’s identification of the creative energy of genius pushes his work to the breaking point. Despite the fact that Kant maintains that the infinite is always noumena, and thus beyond our cognition, productive imagination interrupts the ontology of his critical system.²¹ This is particularly apparent in his three aporias of the imagination: that the imagination “images” and yet cannot be seen; that imagination is related to sensibility and thought, but it cannot be sensed or thought; that it is neither “clear” nor “distinct,” but it illuminates or images the world (see *CPR* A78/B103). The aporetic nature of imagination means that it cannot ground itself with any determination, for it is that which grounds; it escapes signification, for it is that which signifies.

Castoriadis seeks to develop the disruptive nature of Kant’s productive notion of imagination by recasting it as the “radical imagination.”²² He uses the term “radical” to “emphasise the idea that this imagination is before the distinction between ‘real’ and ‘fictitious.’ To put it bluntly: it is because radical imagination exists that reality exists *for us* . . . it is radical because it creates.”²³ This notion of imagination elucidates the transition from the theoretical to the human domain through a process whereby humanity creates itself as a living being in terms of society and history. Of course, this creation does not break from nature in any straightforward sense, for nature remains a real and constraining force upon culture. Rather, imagination extends the given by producing a symbolic realm that must be understood in its social and historical dimensions, producing the “significations and

institutions” that solidify into what Kant describes in terms of schemata.²⁴ Such an account of the imagination requires a basic a-causal energy that is subject to no end other than its own devising. Castoriadis describes this energy as *vis formundi*, a creative power that is not subject to logical strata. The imagination’s a-causality does not mean that it is unconditioned or without relations, for experience and the normative orientation of epistemic claims constitute real constraints upon thought. Rather, it means that it is not subject to causal metaphysics that provides necessary and sufficient reasons for all appearances. The seat of this *vis formundi*, Castoriadis argues, is “the singular human being.”²⁵

In the intellectual context of Paris during the 1970s and 1980s, Castoriadis’ identification of a creative basis to human being and doing aimed to confront the identitary thinking he saw in both Marxism and structuralism. Castoriadis viewed structuralism as an heir of Marxism and thus as the latest manifestation of the west’s penchant for deterministic systems. From the view of structuralism, the symbolic use of language is understood to reveal internal structures, entailing that meaning is ultimately an “epiphenomenon, a redundant accompaniment to what is supposed really to be happening” (*IIS* 172). In Claude Lévi-Strauss’s work, for instance, cultural and linguistic structures are determined by a combination of the structures of the mind and transregional shifts that can only be understood in terms of the social whole. “Symbolic function,” in his view, is a combination of diacritical elements within a structure. Alternatively, Castoriadis argues that “symbolic function” is “imaginative function,” because the basic capacity of symbolism lies in the creativity of imagination. Structuralism remains unable to articulate this creative, imaginative dimension of symbolism, for it has “nothing to say about the sets of elements it manipulates, about the reasons for their being-thus, or about their modifications in time” (*IIS* 170). Masculine and feminine, north and south, are determinations that “all seem self-evident to structuralism, simply found there by humans . . . as if social organisation could be reduced to a finite sequence of yes/no, and as if . . . the terms it implies were themselves given from somewhere else.” In other words, structuralism reduces the “instituted society to a collection of dead rules . . . in the face of which the subject (in order to be ‘structured’) must be immersed in passivity” (*CL* 88). Thus structuralism serves to legitimize established patterns of thinking, failing to confront heteronomous modes of being with the task of questioning and critiquing inherited structures.²⁶ There is no otherness for the structuralist and hence no living sense of history. Instead, “the new is, in every instance, constructed through

identitary operations . . . by means of what was already there; the totality of the process is only the exposing of the necessarily realised virtualities inherent in a primordial principle, present from all time and for all time" (*IIS* 173). Castoriadis concludes that because structuralism is incapable of articulating the creative dimension of human agency, it is unable to provide an alternative to the traditional modes of thinking it aims to critique.

While his critique of structuralism as a mode of identitary logic has clear resonances with Heidegger's critique of technology, Castoriadis argues that Heidegger's ontology also fails to escape from traditional philosophy. He is particularly critical of Heidegger's inability to articulate the creative dimensions of human agency, describing Heidegger's commitment to the ontology of "disclosure" as "the placing-before of what remained hidden but, of course, was already there" (*IIS* 198). The ontology of disclosure privileges the productive procedure that is internal to Aristotle's notion of *poiesis* over the deliberative procedure of *praxis*, meaning that anything that "emerges" within history is framed as a possibility of Being. This entails that when humans "create institutions, poems, music, tools, languages—or monstrosities, concentration camps, etc.—[they] create Nothing" (*IIS* 199). These forms are mere fabrications of given form.

Castoriadis claims that phenomenology marginalizes the creative dimension of *praxis* in the attempt to escape the Kantian representational account of thought. This is particularly clear in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's account of phenomenology. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty argues that "if our relation with the world is *Vorstellung*, the world 'represented' has the In Itself as the meaning of its being."²⁷ Representation is problematically dualistic, for it banishes all that is "real" in a realm outside our ability to perceive. To provide an alternative, Merleau-Ponty proposes to "reach" Being itself: "What I want to do is restore the world as a meaning of Being absolutely different from the 'represented,' that is, as the vertical Being which none of the 'representations' exhaust and which all 'reach,' the wild Being."²⁸

From the vantage of Castoriadis' work, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological method does not draw us underneath the "layer" of representation. Rather, it isolates the intuitive element of imagination without recognizing the necessity of symbolic schematization for the possibility of having experience at all. Thus phenomenology is unable to escape what Castoriadis describes as identitary logic, for it continues the Western tendency to think of representation in terms of a projection screen that separates "subject" and "thing," or, in Heidegger's critique of modern technology, in terms of

a fraudulent mask created by modern technology that causes us to forget Being. Thus he claims that phenomenology *continues* the drive of Western philosophy to overcome the separation between subject and thing; while Western philosophy appeals to a technical mode of thinking capable of guaranteeing the truthfulness of our presentation, phenomenology aims to remove the representational character of thought altogether. In this sense, *both* forms of thinking aspire to access a universal notion of pure Being.

In contrast to phenomenology, Castoriadis argues that representation “questions” and ultimately “destroys” the identitary logic in which being is considered as “one,” as “sameness, as the sameness for all, hence being as common—*koinon*—and the type of logical organisation consubstantial, homologous to this thesis” (*IIS* 330). For philosophers in search of a unitary conception of being, the failure of what is given in representation “to conform to the most basic logical schemata” entails that representation must be denounced. Thus if we are to overcome identitary logic, we require a way of thinking that accepts the representational character of imagination. If we understand the concepts that govern the practice of thinking to be symbolic in character, created for human use, and extending beyond the given, then reflection is not simply a process of identifying concepts that are transcendently necessary; it is also a process by which our thinking “turns back on itself and interrogates itself not only about its particular contents but also about its presuppositions and its foundations.” Since the social institution has furnished these foundations, genuine reflection involves “a challenging of the given institutions of society, the putting into question of socially instituted representations.”²⁹ This task does not attempt to uncover a layer underneath representation. Rather, in a similar way to Cantor’s naive set-theory, it calls the self-positing nature of institutions into question, thereby confronting the constant effort of society—and one’s own cognitive effort—to connect signification and being. When imaginary significations are recognized as only contingently based on the first natural stratum, they become subject to question and alteration, opening us to the possibility of alternative modes of sense-making.

Our capacity to think of this kind of reflection—the fact that we have a grammar to elucidate the ability of the imagination to call itself into question—is made possible by explicit, creative attempts in history to break from the closure of identitary logic. As we have seen, Castoriadis identifies two significant attempts in Aristotle and Kant, for both recognized the power of the imagination to create images that transcend the given, images that are unrealized but not unrealizable.³⁰ He identifies another attempt, one that

precedes Aristotle and Kant, in the Athenian cultural revolution of the fifth century BCE. This attempt was made by philosophers such as Protagoras and Democritus who thought in collaboration with historians, politicians, and poets. The Athenian cultural revolution exemplifies a way of thinking predicated upon a recognition of the self-created nature of social and legal meaning and yet aspired to a reasoned way of making sense in common.

Tragedy and self-formation

To grasp the reflective character of the Athenian cultural revolution, Castoriadis argues that we must first identify a historical method that does not simply reproduce identity logic. In a logicist historical method, “the new is, in every instance, constructed through *identitary* operations . . . by means of what was already there” (*IIS* 173). Thus the time of “radical otherness, an otherness that can neither be deduced nor produced, has to be abolished.” Yet if we accept the productive dimensions of thought, it follows that history “cannot itself ‘have a meaning’ (or, moreover, ‘not have meaning’)—any more than a gravitational field can have (or not have) a weight, or an economic space can have (or not have) a price.”³¹ Instead, history is the sphere of creation, meaning that it “is that in and through which meaning . . . is conferred upon things, acts, etc.”³² This concept of history requires a method that recognizes that there can be no definitive account of the Greek understanding of *anthropos*, for example, but only the history of how Greek writers understood the term.³³ To search for a definitive account of Greek thought is to overlook the fact that “the ‘spirit’ of ancient Greeks is realized precisely as alteration, self-alteration, self-institution—all three notions interwoven with striving toward self-knowledge, which is continuous effort, work, and process, not a static result.”³⁴ The basic characteristic of ancient Greek history is “precisely that it is *history* in the most emphatic sense of the term.”³⁵

Castoriadis’ historical method emphasizes the otherness of historical being.³⁶ When examined in terms of this radical notion of historical being, tragedy has no proper content but is rather a transgressive form of art that opens its audience to questions of their nature and limits. The tragedies disrupt patterns of thinking that have solidified and become impervious to new form, providing a window into a society that undertook the project of collectively interrogating its shared meanings. They form a public institution that, for the original spectators, questioned traditional notions

of responsibility and agency (*Agamemnon*), explored the indeterminacy of *nomos* (*Antigone*), unveiled the danger of hubris (*Ajax*), and even called public decisions into question (*The Trojan Women*). In Castoriadis' words, tragedy "exhibits the uncertainty pervading the [political] field, it sketches the impurity of motives, it exposes the inconclusive character of the reasoning upon which we base our decisions."³⁷

As a public institution that reveals the uncertainty of the political field, Castoriadis considers tragedy as a disruption of identity logic. Rather than presenting the shared world of the Athenians (understood in terms of the Cosmos) as grounded on the logical foundation of Being, the tragedies unveil "Being as Chaos." To unveil Being as Chaos is to show that the "order of the world has no 'meaning' for man."³⁸ At first glance, Castoriadis' description of tragedy as the unveiling of the chaos of being appears to resonate with Nietzsche's idea of tragedy as the presentation of true being that lies beneath the layer of representation. However, he does not suggest that representation occludes original chaos, meaning that it must be overcome by participating in the nonconceptual passion of the Primordial One. Rather, he argues that the tragedies are "transparent."³⁹ The tragedies are not phenomenal, allowing us to participate with chaos in a way that transports us under the layer of representation. Rather, they are representations, but representations of a transparent kind; they allow us to see through the fixity of the continental plates of social institutions to the magmatic flux underneath.⁴⁰ In other words, the tragedies do not invite us in to participate with being but, paradoxically, give the abyssal ground of reality a kind of form.

In contrast to Heidegger's transcultural, ontological interpretation of tragedy, Castoriadis' method shifts our attention to the cultural specificity of tragic presentation. Because the tragedies are not merely phenomenal but transparent, they cannot be understood to give an abstract presentation of "chaos" as a layer underneath the flux of representations. Rather, they reveal the chaotic basis—the magma—underneath a particular constellation of identity thinking by presenting the inherited content of social life in a new form. In the context of ancient Greece, the shift from representing ancient myths from epic to dramatic form oriented the spectators to their tradition in an unprecedented way. In this sense it is not the content that changes but the form in which it is presented. The univocal authority of the chorus is displaced by the polyvalent collision of opposing characters. The spectators are confronted with a multitude of perspectives and come to see the chorus as one voice among many—the voice of tradition—rather than

the bearers of an authoritative interpretation of the events. By replacing the univocal form of epic with a polyvalent form, tragedy refrains from giving a final interpretation of the action and, instead, represents the judgments made by each character and the reasoning upon which those judgments are made. The spectators gain a new orientation to the content of epic, for they are confronted with the inconclusive character of the reasoning upon which the heroes base their decisions and make claims to legitimacy. They become the jury faced with the monstrous crimes performed by the heroes. To use Herbert Marcuse's words, tragedy "re-presents reality while accusing it," alienating individuals from their functional existence in the effort to emancipate the imagination.⁴¹

By placing the heroes before the watching audience, the entire cultural history of Athens is cleaved open before the watching spectators and revealed to be the outworking of individual, fallible choices, many of which are highly dubious. For example, Homer's presentation of the battle of Troy in the *Odyssey* is reconsidered by Aeschylus in *Agamemnon* three hundred years later in a manner that positions the spectators to call the entire myth into question. In the *Odyssey*, Agamemnon is forced to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia so that the winds would give a favorable passage for his army on their journey to the battle of Troy. He returns from Troy as the triumphant conqueror only to be killed by Aegisthus, who has taken Agamemnon's wife Clytemnestra as his lover.⁴² While the death of the heroic king after a long and victorious voyage is unfortunate, Agamemnon's death is not tragic. In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, however, Agamemnon meets a different fate. He returns from Troy claiming that his heroic victory was not simply his own but the act of divine vengeance.⁴³ While he is busy heralding his shared triumph with the gods whose supposed "protecting power / Sent forth, and brought [him] home again" (ll. 852–853), Clytemnestra awaits him. She plays the role of the affectionate wife, laying out a purple carpet to honor his victory. The carpet is not the victor's path, however, for it signals her intent to turn victory march into funeral procession; she holds Agamemnon responsible for murdering their daughter and brutally kills him when he reaches their home. The chorus charges Clytemnestra guilty of a grievous crime and swiftly calls for retribution. Clytemnestra responds by claiming that her action was justified by Apollo, who helped her to see that "The guile I used to kill him / He used himself at first" (ll. 1524–1525). However, the chorus also charges Agamemnon guilty, for they recognize that his sacrifice of Iphigenia was ultimately done because he valued his glory and his war over the demands of his family. The sacrifice of his daughter did not

mark his “sending off” by the gods; the chorus recognizes that it is aimed to “keep morale from sagging / in superstitious soldiers” (ll. 806–807). It was a “sin” (*hamartia*) that violated the “awe that parenthood must claim” (ll. 226, 133). The spectators are positioned to see the battle of Troy not as the vengeance of the gods but as the outward king of Agamemnon’s ego.

While the chorus informs the spectators that error lies with both Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, it proves unable to decide on a right course of action. The situation is too complex, too fraught with contradictions for the voice of tradition to provide a response. The spectators are left to critically assess the reasoning that each character gives for their actions, and yet, like the chorus, they cannot make sense of the situation with their predetermined ideas of justice. They must search for a new procedure that is capable of balancing the competing elements of collective life.

By focusing on the activity of human judgment, the tragedies orient the spectators to the political sphere under a new way of thinking that is absolutely “other” to that which preceded it. The tragedies do not appeal to any universal reference points outside a form of life but present the practice of judgment as a tenuous, dangerous, *human* activity. The tragic poets lived in a time of transition, where new institutions were emerging within traditional religious practices. They experienced a time of rupture and saw the need for new ways of making sense of human action. They created artworks that pry open an old foundation of validity and reveal it to be inadequate to deal with experience, throwing the spectators back onto their own devices. Thus they alert us to the inescapable reality of judgment: that “nothing can guarantee the *a priori* correctness of action,” neither divine law nor human reason.⁴⁴

In the Greek tragedies we find that recognizing the failure of an inherited mode of thinking to navigate new problems opens a way of thinking based on experience and reflection. Tradition is displaced from a position of transcendental authority in a society, and a new task is established in its place: the task of judging novel problems without the use of preestablished laws. Thus tragedy cannot be understood as the rejection of tradition for a new form of inquiry. Rather, it is the *transformation* of tradition. Tragedy establishes a new, critical relation to tradition where new tools are drawn from a traditional gamut of references.

Castoriadis’ understanding of this new relation to tradition is best seen in his reading of Sophocles’ *Antigone*. Contrary to Hegel’s interpretation of *Antigone* as the collision of family and law and Heidegger’s reading of *Antigone* as the daring hero, Castoriadis argues that “the subject of

the tragedy is *hubris* itself: the act committed ‘because of reckless daring’ (*tolmas charin*).⁴⁵ Like Hegel, Castoriadis suggests that Antigone and Creon represent two conflicting authorities: Antigone claims to uphold the “divine law” that calls one, when an orphan, to forsake all for one’s brother, while Creon appeals to the self-grounding system of “human law” where no city can exist without restrictions just as no city can tolerate treason. Yet contrary to Hegel, Castoriadis argues that neither Sophocles nor the Athenian people would have seen these contrasting authorities as incompatible. Indeed, Sophocles does not present them as contradictory at all. As we find in the final lines of the famous choral ode, *anthropos* can become *hupsipolis* (standing high in one’s city) by “weaving them together [*pareiron*].”⁴⁶ The scenes that follow the choral ode present the incapacity of either Antigone or Creon to think in a way that is capable of weaving together their competing demands. Thus the drama of *Antigone* is not so much about the content of the ethical commitments held by Antigone and Creon as it is about their *way of thinking*. Both characters blindly defend one of the two principles, becoming *hubristes* and *apolis*. The act that renders them *hubristes*, we find in Haemon’s warning to Creon, is the attempt to be *monos phronein*, the one who “thinks right,” thereby going beyond the limits of *phronein*.⁴⁷ The attempt to be *monos phronein* is not foreign to us. It expresses a mode of thought that echoes throughout the tradition of Western philosophy in the attempts to determine all knowledge in the paradigm of *techné*.

Castoriadis suggests that the notion of *hubris* provides a new schema by which to present action and speech that transgresses the limits of the *polis*, or in terms of my elaboration of Castoriadis’ account of concept acquisition, it provides a new rule on the level of step (4) in order to govern the application of normativity in step (3). By presenting claims of legitimacy in terms of human judgment, the tragedies do not condemn the heroes for transgressing some natural or divine limit, meaning that they warrant divine punishment. Rather, they are condemned for transgressing the limits of judgment, that is, for holding their claim “ought to be seen” as justifiable without reference to the common. In this sense, the significance of Sophocles’ depiction of Creon and Antigone lies in his presentation of two kinds of thinking that transgress the limits of judgment. The characters act in the belief that the correctness of their action is guaranteed either by the new forms of law emerging in democratic Athens or in the old gods of the city. Castoriadis argues that Sophocles’ major achievement is that he does not critique the content of either claim but rather the form in which both claims are made, thereby showing us that “even when we are right, it is

possible that we may be wrong—there is never a final *logical* reason” when it comes to action.⁴⁸ Nothing can provide a guarantee that we are acting in the right way, neither the traditional gods nor the new region of law.

Castoriadis argues that the tragedies do not simply present the failure of thinking alone, but that they also outline a new way of thinking that is capable of navigating the practical sphere. This is particularly evident in Haemon's climactic confrontation with Creon. The choral ode anticipates the confrontation between Haemon and Creon by celebrating the terrifying ability of human beings to build cities and create institutions while recognizing their profound failure to control themselves, inspiring the audience to a relation of awe and wonder to the most unsettling and enigmatic being: the human being. Given the chorus's praise of the one who is able to weave together the conflicting demands of community life, the collision of Antigone and Creon draws our attention to the fact that neither is capable of this weaving for the very reason that neither listens to the reasons of the other. Instead, both Antigone and Creon approach the situation with a predetermined law and base their judgment on a closed order of meaning that is irrefutable from the outside. In this impossible situation, Haemon, who is betrothed to Antigone, approaches his father. He refuses to directly engage in his father's arguments, for he recognizes that Creon's reasoning is sound within the closure of his notion of right. Indeed, he announces to Creon, “Neither do I want nor am I able to say that you are wrong” (l. 686). As their dialogue unfolds, we find that Haemon is aware that Creon is wrong not because the determinate content of his conviction is false, but because he follows a procedure that protects his thinking from the judgment of others: “For whoever believes he alone is capable of judgment / or whoever believes he has a soul or an eloquence that no one else has, / when such people are opened up, they are seen to be empty” (ll. 707–709). Haemon argues that Creon is wrong *even though he is right*. He is wrong because his way of thinking takes the form of *monos phronein*, of thinking independently of human counsel. Haemon concludes by begging Creon “not to be wise alone” (l. 709).

Castoriadis identifies in Haemon's words an epistemological procedure that suspends the finality of individual claims to objectivity and aims toward publicity, drawing the tragedies into proximity with Kant's enlarged way of thinking. Kant's proposal of an enlarged way of thinking outlines a process of taking into account the thoughts of others. It outlines a way of thinking that is attuned to the contingent nature of the public sphere, for it acknowledges the representational character of thinking and yet aspires

toward universality. After his third *Critique*, Kant consistently stressed that the faculty of thinking depends upon its public use: without “the test of free and open examination,” he states, neither thinking nor opinion-formation are possible.⁴⁹ Opinions are not private convictions that we bring, predetermined, to political decision making, for reason is not made “to isolate itself but to get into community with others.” Kant’s project is one of impartial thought, meaning that rational opinions must stand the test of thinking in common.

Tragedy and philosophy

Castoriadis’ interpretation of tragedy draws the origins of philosophy and the origins of tragedy into a single project of opening and questioning the second stratum of human significations. Like tragedy, the creation of philosophy is seen by Castoriadis to signify a “rupture” within the closure of instituted society, involving the “explicit putting into question . . . of the representations and words” of a society.⁵⁰ This rupture forms a new type of being, which he describes as “reflexive and deliberative subjectivity.”

Yet what is it that causes this rupture? Castoriadis suggests that the rupture of philosophy begins when the being of nature does not appear as a given, fixed part of experience but as a question that demands our attention.⁵¹ He does not suggest that this alteration in appearance can be attributed to the agency of being. Rather, it is the result of creative, interrogative thinking in the context of social and historical alteration. This is particularly evident in ancient Greek vocabulary during the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, as the word for nature, *phusis*, became a site of contestation over particular ensembles of meaning. While Homer seems to be the first to use an early form of *phusis* (*phua*) in order to indicate generation and growth, its scope was limited to the vegetative domain.⁵² Heraclitus introduced an anthropological dimension to *phusis*, conceiving it in relation to the human condition. For the Sophists, *phusis* (that which is subject to its own proper principle) was connected to *nomos* (that which is subject to a created principle) in the debate over which parts of the human condition are natural and which are convention.⁵³

Castoriadis suggests that by placing *phusis* in relation to *nomos*, Heraclitus and the Sophists problematize the being of nature, prying open social significations in such a way that energizes the philosophical project. When poets and philosophers began to present the secondary, social stratum of

experience in terms of created principles, it became separated from the first natural stratum. To recognize this separation—even in the single context of human law—is to recognize the creative role of human thought in generating a second nature in order to navigate the first natural stratum. Castoriadis suggests that this distinction between *phusis* and *nomos* is “one of the great creative moments of Greek thought, and its most characteristic.”⁵⁴ On one side, *phusis* signifies “the push, the endogenous and spontaneous growth of things that nevertheless is also generative of an order.” On the other side, *nomos*, “usually translated as ‘law,’ originally signified the law of sharing, therefore institution, therefore usage (ways and customs), therefore a convention, and, at the limit, convention pure and simple.”⁵⁵ In this sense *nomos* establishes a lasting “imaginary institution by means of which we make ourselves qua human beings.”⁵⁶ In the rupture occurring in the Greek social world, if something pertains to *nomos* and not to *phusis* then that something depends on human conventions and not on the nature of beings.

Castoriadis recognizes three significant implications stemming from the separation of *nomos* from *phusis* that provide the shared ground not only for philosophy and tragedy but also for the project of democratic politics.⁵⁷ The first is that to separate *nomos* from *phusis* is to say that there can be no *phusis* of *nomos*, that there can be no determinate principle of human institutions. If human institutions are separate from the first natural stratum and are not determined by it, it follows that they are contingent and thus subject to question and alteration. The second is that *nomos* is created by human activity, an insight reflected in the self-adjudging institutions that arose in Athens in which the laws governing human affairs were subject to deliberation and alteration. Third, Castoriadis identifies that the opposition of *nomos* and *phusis* entails that “there is at least one type of being, human being, that creates, gives rise to, its own *eidōs* in a ‘non-natural’ fashion, without this *eidōs* being found already, *dunamēi*, in its determinate potentialities.”⁵⁸ This recognition of self-creativity entails a notion of imagination, of *phantasia*, which does not imitate *phusis* but creates a symbolic order that extends it beyond the existing.

By arguing that philosophy and democracy share similar historical origins, Castoriadis rejects the understanding of philosophy assumed by Plato and the rationalist tradition. Plato denies the shared ground of philosophy and democracy, for he contrasts the contingent character of democracy with the necessity of philosophical truth. Aristotle’s stance, however, is not so clear. While Aristotle sought to bring *nomos* and *phusis* back into the realm of human affairs, he also aims to heal the tension between them by

identifying a distinct realm appropriate to each, the realm in which things “cannot be other wise” and the realm of “coming-to-be.”⁵⁹ However, while Aristotle attempts to ease the tension between the two spheres, he is not ultimately successful. In response to the Sophists who separated *nomos* and *phusis*, Aristotle argued that *anthropos* is by nature (*phusis*) a political animal (one who creates *nomos*), meaning that the creative element of human beings is a product of nature. While this definition places *nomos* in the human domain, it removes *phusis* to the determinative realm of being. Yet when Aristotle defines *phusis* in *Physics*, he gives two definitions that appear to contradict each other.

The first interpretation Aristotle gives is tied to the idea of *telos*: “nature [is] end and that in view of which [something occurs]” (*he de phusis telos kai hou heneka*).⁶⁰ For Aristotle, every “thing” is a part of a chain of means and ends. Each thing is always the end of an interior thing and means of a thing superior in value. A thing that has an end is a kind of artifact, what modern philosophers refer to as a “machine” that has a final goal. A watch, for example, has an end (or a nature), which is to tell the time. This end is not determined by an inner principle (*principia domestica*) but is endowed as an efficient cause (*nexus effectivus*) by an external force, in this case a watchmaker. Aristotle poses a second definition of *phusis* that is able to accommodate the finalities of the living being, that is, a self-organizing being that cannot be understood in terms of efficient causation but requires reference to final causation (*nexus finalis*): “the essence of the things that have in themselves, as such, principle of movement [*arkhen kineseos*].”⁶¹ This definition entails that *phusis* contains in itself the origin and the principle of its movement, meaning that living beings posit themselves partially as their own ends. In this definition, movement (*kinesis*) is not only local movement. It is also change, generation, and alteration (*alloiosis*).

Castoriadis argues that Aristotle’s second definition of *phusis* as the essence of self-forming things stands in a radical tension with the first. Aristotle’s second definition shifts the notion of *phusis* from “that which has in itself the principle or the origin of its movement” into “that which has in itself the principle or the origin of its change—of its alteration.”⁶² It is to say that nature forms itself—it creates itself—expanding our concept of nature as the determinative ground for eternal being. If nature is truly self-forming, then there is no fixed order by which we can legislate natural appearances. Rather, our concepts of natural things would be contingent significations that do not determine the thing’s being but elucidate its inner principle. Castoriadis claims that the tension between Aristotle’s two defini-

tions of *phusis* echoes the tragic collision of *nomos* and *phusis*, for it contrasts the determination of nature according to a proper principle with the concept of nature as indeterminate. In other words, it problematizes the necessary, stable determination of appearances that is claimed by identity logic, introducing a zone of indeterminacy between nature and the institutions through which we understand nature. In short, the tension between Aristotle's two definitions confronts us with the fact that *phusis* can give no necessary grounding for *nomos*, requiring us to reconsider the mode of thinking appropriate to human institutions such as language and politics.

Heidegger also saw the contradiction between Aristotle's two definitions of nature, yet he aimed to remove it by prioritizing the radical indeterminacy of *phusis* over *nomos*. He observes that, in *Physics*, "Aristotle conceives of *phusis* as the beingness (*ousia*) of a particular (and in itself delimited) region of beings. . . . But this same treatise of the *Metaphysics* [I, 1003a27] says exactly the opposite: *ousia* (of the Being of beings as such in totality) is something like *phusis*."⁶³ Heidegger notes that in Aristotle's first definition, nature is not just one of two equal terms (nature and freedom, nature and spirit, nature and law, and so on), for it "holds the position of priority."⁶⁴ Freedom, spirit, law, and all "non-natural" potentialities of human being are determined by nature, finding their existence in relation to a ground that defines their parameters. In the second definition, however, we hear an "echo of the great beginning of Greek philosophy," that is, the beginning we find in the Presocratic thinkers and tragic poets. In this beginning "Being was *phusis*, such that the *phusis* that Aristotle conceptualized can only be a latter derivative of original *phusis*."⁶⁵ Heidegger suggests that the task of philosophy, like the original tragedies, is to allow this primary notion of *phusis* to come into appearance. This form of philosophy would refuse to determine the beingness (*ousia*) of beings in the model of Aristotle's first definition and instead provide a space for beings to emerge.

While Heidegger is attentive to the tension between Aristotle's two definitions of nature—nature as determinant ground and nature as originary appearance—by attempting to prioritize the originary conception of nature without the mediation of human representational faculties, he occludes the tension between *phusis* and the representational creativity of humans in the form of *nomos*. For Heidegger, the task of philosophy is one of retrieving the "echo of the great beginning." Thus he does not bring the self-forming concept of nature into relation with the second-order stratum of human form (*nomos*). Instead, he inverts the Platonic dualism of form over simulacrum, positing form as the occlusion of primary appearance.⁶⁶ When *phusis*

is understood as primary to *nomos*, the task of philosophy is one of overcoming representation, of unveiling the primary movement of being that is obfuscated by the representational paradigm of thought. In this sense, Heidegger's philosophy casts the self-created nature of *nomos* aside as a part of the anti-tragic philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, reducing creativity to a mode of production for the sake of maintaining the agency of Being.

To understand the alternative that Castoriadis' conception of the *phusis/nomos* problematic provides to Heidegger's philosophy, it is important to identify the close parallels between Castoriadis' conception of tragedy and Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. Throughout this book I have suggested that, during the eighteenth century, the rediscovery of the self-organizing concept of nature provided the catalyst to the discovery of the failure of philosophy to determine all truth in the paradigm of *techne*. When philosophy is confronted with its failure to provide a manner of thinking that is adequate to the self-forming, living being, it is again confronted with the *nomos/phusis* problematic, an encounter that can be understood in the form of tragedy. When seen as an aesthetic representation of two opposing concepts of nature, it is not Schelling, Hölderlin, or Hegel who first presents the tragedy of philosophy. Rather, it is Kant. In *Critique of Judgment*, the conception of nature as determinate ground and as contingent appearance comes to a particular climax in the antinomy of teleological judgment. Kant's engagement with the radical biological movements of the late eighteenth century led him to problematize what Castoriadis describes in terms of the identitary logic of traditional ontology. The discovery of the living being requires a new conception of the ground of philosophy, of nature, in terms of a fluid and dynamic condition of possibility. And yet it does not require the end of representational thought. In contrast to Heidegger's philosophy, which prioritizes the dynamic possibility of nature at the expense of human representation, nature and the human capacity to represent nature converge in a single project of creative exploration.

If we use Castoriadis' understanding of philosophy to elucidate Kant's project in *Critique of Judgment*, then several important conclusions follow from Kant's presentation of the antinomy of teleological judgment. First, presenting the antinomy of teleological judgment allows us to recognize that our representation of nature is limited to our concept of nature, that is, to the collective institution of nature that is historically contingent. Second, recognizing the representational character of thought separates human cognition from the being of nature. Third, recognizing the zone of indeter-

minacy between nature and human thought requires the acknowledgment of the contingency of human signification. Fourth, contingency does not entail absolute lawlessness, but that laws are open and in a co-determinate relationship with the appearances they govern. This is precisely what lawfulness without law means: we are aware that our cognition bears a normative directedness, but that the schemata and inferential rules that govern cognition do not have a causal relation to the being of nature. In this sense, Kant's understanding of contingency aims to solve the problem that was raised by his examination of judgment in *Critique of Pure Reason*: that nature conforms to judgment, but that judgment cannot access the being of nature. The antinomy of teleological judgment, understood as the contradiction between the concept of nature as lawfully determined and the concept of nature as self-forming (as beyond the limits of human thought), demonstrates that if our concept of nature is unable to recognize contingency, then the universe is limited to a theoretical order of cause and effect (for us). When we "confuse" the heteronomy of reflecting judgment for the autonomy of determining judgment, the otherness of historical creation is unthinkable. The procedure of thinking that is aware of this dilemma, on the other hand, does not give law to nature but to itself; it self-limits by refraining from its determinative operation in contexts that involve living, self-organizing beings, and it turns to the public for confirmation.

Castoriadis suggests that Kant's conception of heteronomy points toward a dimension of autonomous self-formation that is primary to the notion of autonomy as the determination of nature and action according to reason. In his essay "'Physis' and Autonomy," Castoriadis states that in the discovery of the living being we arrive "at an idea of autonomy that differs radically from simple self-constitution."⁶⁷ This deeper conception of autonomy involves "the capacity of a society or of an individual, to act deliberately and explicitly in order to modify its law—that is to say, its form. *Nomos* becomes the explicit self-creation of form, which thus makes it appear both as, still, the opposite of *physis*—and as one of the latter's points of culmination."⁶⁸ Kant's designation of the productive capacity of the imagination to create symbolic form that is lawful and yet without law, to give shape to "another nature" out of its experience of nature, maintains this tension between *nomos* as self-creation and *nomos* as nature's culmination. The explicit cultivation of our productive capacities—the project of autonomy—is thus both a break with nature and the deepest expression of our natural, organic selves. Thus autonomy cannot be mere self-constitution,

for the imagination is a socially directed faculty. Rather, autonomy requires the collective interrogation and creation of the symbolic form by which we navigate the natural stratum.

Castoriadis identifies in Kant's work the outlines for a project that authentically engages with the tragedy of philosophy, understood as the inevitable failure of modes of philosophy that presume the notion of Being as "being something determined." If human creativity is ontological to the extent that, through creative *praxis*, it brings genuinely new forms into being, then the task of philosophy is not to build a vision of society in terms of philosophically defined ends but to outline a procedure that acknowledges society as an open project. To this extent Kant's *Critique of Judgment* is an important moment in the project of autonomy, for it redirects philosophy from the task of constructing a completed system of knowledge to one of outlining a procedure for thinking according to the principle of mutual communicability.

Reading Kant as a philosopher who, at least implicitly, conceived of philosophy in terms of tragedy identifies the greatest achievement of his critical philosophy in the collapse of the distinction between the "enlightened few," the philosophers, and the naive *hoi polloi*. While this collapse is present in Kant's first two *Critiques*, it culminates in his notion of the *sensus communis*, the ideal community that is not monopolized by philosophy but is presumed by every judgment that is aesthetic. When the distinction between the philosophers and the people evaporates, philosophy ceases to be the quest for objective knowledge and, instead, embraces humankind in the manner that Kant outlined in his famous acknowledgment, "Rousseau set me right."⁶⁹ When philosophy embraces humankind, its preoccupation with "politics" in the Platonic sense disappears.⁷⁰ When self-interest is sublimated into a public affair and philosophy recognizes that it cannot make claims by virtue of its superior knowledge, the old tension between philosophy and politics is healed. The need to lay down the rules for an ideal, philosophical society dissolves, and philosophy is faced with the task of outlining a procedure in which society is posited as a shared, creative project. In this framework, philosophy is part of the same project as tragedy to the extent that it opens society for creative transformation through the recognition of limits.

Kant's proposal of an enlarged way of thinking makes a significant contribution to this project. It requires a process of self-limitation whereby one sets oneself "apart from the subjective private conditions of the judgment" and reflects on one's own "judgment from a universal standpoint"

(*CJ* 5:295). In this sense, philosophy—and tragedy—has politics as its goal. Philosophy is not, however, reducible to politics, for its task is to open the political sphere to creative transformation, to open our vision to see the priority of creative *praxis* over the technical application of concepts to phenomena. If this reflective principle became a working phenomenon of society, philosophy would not be understood as “what philosophers do in the academy.” Rather, it would be understood as the formation of citizens capable of weaving together the competing demands of the *polis*. Sophocles’ image of weaving is a powerful metaphor of political collaboration, for it elucidates the creative task of navigating the competing demands of civic life, of learning a way of thinking wherein our own judgments are invitations to other citizens to reflect from common ground.

Conclusion

Almost anything that consoles us is a fake.

—Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good*

How can tragedy still matter? I have suggested that the enlarged way of thinking Kant develops in *Critique of Judgment* constitutes a major contribution to a broader philosophical project aiming to problematize our inherited ideas and reshape them as unrealized, collective enterprises. This project, I have tried to show, falls into continuity with the Greek tragedies; like them, it transforms the failure of traditional patterns of thinking into a shared and open task. It acknowledges the naked limits of the intellect and thereby sublimates the subjective interest that would lead our thought beyond the conditions of its possibility into a concern for the whole. This occurs via a reflective process that disrupts the immediacy of our own subjectivity and allows the intuitive content of thought to remain open and underdetermined as our claims are redirected to the broader community.

Kant's proposal of an enlarged way of thinking in *Critique of Judgment* highlights the importance of the representational account of human thought for navigating tragedy's challenge to philosophy. Representation is not a problem to be overcome, a division estranging subject from object. Rather, it offers a grammar to express the creative dimension of human thought, one that shapes the given according to form held in common and yet has no necessary relation to the natural stratum. By foregrounding the representational character of thought, tragedy disrupts the ambition to access pure being and, in its place, calls us to the task of making sense together. Tragedy vividly illustrates that nature is not simply what can be controlled and determined, a background to the enclosed drama of concepts, but rather that which generously discloses itself, always exceeding the horizon of present sight. To this extent tragedy presents the essential paradox of

human thought: that recognizing our poverty allows something greater than us to appear. This paradox denies the hegemony of the philosophic over the aesthetic, occasioning a transformation—itsself a form of *katharsis*—in which our deepest longings for truth reach hidden, unknown paths, as we arrive at the knowledge that, as Bakhtin states, “the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future.”¹

As I have written, a vision of tragedy as a distinctly philosophical problematic provides an alternative to the two main approaches to tragedy taken by contemporary philosophers. The Nietzschean view rejects the philosophical tradition as a systematic attempt to render suffering explicable. Tragedy serves as a bulwark against two millennia of error, symbolizing the collision of old ideas with new needs in a world of dissonant forces. The Idealist view is concerned to identify tragedy as a response to the crisis occurring between philosophy and the empirical sciences at the turn of the nineteenth century. Tragedy becomes a corrective to philosophy, meaning that the task of philosophy is to grasp the Idea of the tragic so that it can encompass finitude, contingency, and death. While I have recognized enriching and vital elements in both views, I have labored to show that where they emphasize the question of tragedy’s proper content unduly, both views distract from the underlying problem: that philosophy, the task we now undertake, is itself subject to tragedy. Tragedy is not limited to specific epochal moments in cultural history, revolutions and transitional crises between paradigms, though such experiences do foreground specific forms of cultural blindness. Rather, tragedy shows that human thought is prone to wander and to overreach itself, that hubris is fundamental to human thinking.

This interpretation of philosophy’s engagement with tragedy differs from the Nietzschean and Idealist views in that it does not reject the philosophical project or provide a definitive account of tragedy. The Nietzschean and Idealist views understand tragedy as a relic and its philosophical possibilities as a kind of specialized remembering. In contrast, the method I have employed in this book attends to the legion voices that populate the tragic form and idea. This method led us to discover the cogency of tragedy not in past experience or cultural memory but in a common desire to widen the philosophical horizon to allow for a concept of human spontaneity in genuine union with nature. To grasp tragedy one must be aware of tragedy in one’s own experience; one must, furthermore, undergo a transformation whereby the given is opened to the possibility of the ungiven.

Conceived thus, the problematic of tragedy is ultimately a matter of raising questions about philosophical procedure, and to this extent Kant’s

enlarged way of thinking provides an exemplary response to tragedy. This is not to say that Kant's philosophy must be accepted *in toto* if one is to benefit from this new procedure. Rather, it is to say that Kant's response to the failure of philosophy—his acknowledgment of the limits of philosophy and his search for a new way of thinking adequate to living form—opens and extends a philosophical project that takes seriously the proximity of tragedy to all human thinking and doing. Even Nietzsche, no ally of Kant's, can be understood in terms of this view. Nietzsche's attack on the life-denying nature of rationalist philosophy demands an enlarged vision of philosophy, one capable of reconciling the discursive practice of philosophy with life itself. If life does not adhere to a rational standard where all appearances are explained by efficient causation, then the procedure for thinking must encompass the singular character of appearances. Nietzsche's attempt to manifest the tragic age inaugurated by Kant, to reveal the life-denying character of morality and identify a way of feeling the whole of life, shows a desire to enlarge philosophy beyond what can be encompassed by a logical system. Nietzsche cannot, however, lead us beyond this insight. Tragedy belongs properly to the anthropic sphere, and the task revealed by our experience of tragedy is, as we find in Kant, to remain within this problematic: to recognize our proximity to our fellow spectators and to find in that kinship a new way of thinking.

The final task of this study is to turn explicitly to the question of how this interpretation of tragedy inflects our reading of contemporary philosophy's renewed interest in tragedy. My aim in what follows is to identify the continuity of this interest with the ongoing dialogue I have examined throughout this book. It follows that the renewed interest in tragedy is not simply a development in the history of ideas but a movement in philosophy comparable to other times when tragedy pressed urgently upon the philosophical mind. To establish this continuity, I identify three themes in the contemporary philosophy of tragedy that extend this book's broader dialogue into the present: the enlargement of the imagination, the recognition of ethical complexity, and the search for a new understanding of universality. These themes phrase and exemplify the present urgency of the tragic.

Imagination

One feature of the problematic of tragedy extended by contemporary philosophers is the use of tragedy to disrupt established ways of thinking to

enlarge our awareness of possibilities beyond the given. While for Hegel tragedy is no longer the bearer of historical truth, it retains the ability to confront us with the limits of (Kantian) morality and expand our understanding of ethical life. For Nietzsche, tragedy entices us to riot against the moral constraints that deny the vivid fragility of life and shatters—albeit for a moment—the limits and boundaries placed upon us. In Heidegger's understanding, tragedy confronts us with the differential character of *techné* obscured by modern technology. Castoriadis argues that tragic presentation tears us out of our investment in the instituted world and confronts us with the task of autonomy. While the content disrupted by tragedy is different in each case, there is a consensus that tragedy confronts a constellation of thinking that has calcified in the words and practices of society and opens us to perceptions larger than inherited thought.

By examining this theme in philosophical history, the contemporary interest in tragedy aims to confront the tendency of current modes of philosophy to neglect matters beyond the remit of the empirical sciences. For example, Terry Eagleton suggests that the reception of tragedy is a kind of litmus test for philosophy's ability to understand itself as a rigorous science and still posit the basic questions of human life and freedom. In this view, the fact that contemporary philosophy finds tragedy "too solemn and portentous" is tantamount to its inability to think beyond the limits of the scientific method.² Eagleton argues that the tragedies provide "a reminder that whatever our civilized achievements we remain an arbitrary outcropping of Nature, monstrous or amphibious animals who straddle two domains and will never be quite at home in either."³ Martha Nussbaum agrees, arguing that contemporary philosophy is suspicious of tragedy because it has confined itself to a paradigm of philosophical thinking that is restricted to what can be defined and known, excluding matters of suffering, emotion, and anguish, that is, the very fabric of human life according to the tragedies.⁴ For Dennis Schmidt, contemporary philosophy has limited itself to such a narrow set of problems that it is unable to respond to the manifold questions that humans have asked throughout history.⁵ Schmidt argues that tragedy contains a reflective capacity, providing a new conceptual discourse "in which the horror that human beings can create for themselves [can be] displayed and so reflected upon."⁶ For Eagleton, Nussbaum, and Schmidt, tragedy reveals the inability of a philosophy that mimics the rigor of empirical science to explore matters that cannot be quantified, predicted, or isolated from their complex environments. Thus it interrupts philosophy, calling for a broader scope that includes topics to which it has traditionally remained silent.

While Nussbaum, Eagleton, and Schmidt stress the importance of tragedy from the vantage of the history of philosophy, the need for philosophy to enlarge its view is also felt elsewhere. Stanley Cavell argues that what is often classed as “analytic philosophy” is likewise unable to tackle “the wider, traditional problems of human culture,” which warrant a return to art, and to tragedy in particular.⁷ In Cavell’s vision, the dominance of naturalism in analytic philosophy results in an attempt to equate philosophical knowledge with the empirical sciences. The empirical sciences see themselves as having “methods” for arriving at reliable results. When philosophy is limited to technical issues that can be approached in this way, anything that does not conform to a naturalist paradigm or cannot appear within its methodology is deemed insufficient as philosophical knowledge.

Cavell’s critique of analytic philosophy bears an interesting parallel with the criticisms made by “continental” philosophers who turn to tragedy as a means to question their trade. Kalliopi Nikolopoulou argues that continental philosophy often contains an “explicit—and more often, implicit—denial of tragedy as a viable mode of being in and understanding our world.”⁸ Nikolopoulou situates this denial in the guiding assumption of continental philosophy that culture goes all the way down. Such philosophers give exclusive focus to the cultural dimensions of human being, thus removing the antinomy between nature and culture upon which tragedy is predicated. By stripping humans of any remnant of a human nature in the attempt to reject the Cartesian concept of subjectivity that presumes freedom as a distinctive human faculty, the continental tradition thereby occludes tragic experience. Within this experience the feeling of moral freedom collides with the arbitrary formations of culture, thus tipping the scale to the opposite extreme of the modern philosophers they aim to correct. Cavell and Nikolopoulou suggest that neither the analytic nor continental traditions are capable of encompassing the wider questions that philosophy has traditionally posed concerning life, death, the good, friendship, creativity, and wonder. They suggest that tragedy counterposes the limited view of contemporary thinking, alerting us to the deeper questions that confront every human life, if only we could hear them.

However, while the contemporary interest in tragedy draws upon Greek tragedy as a source by which to identify the limitations of recent trends in philosophy, it does not conceptualize certain parts of contemporary thinking as a present form of tragedy. Given our study of key voices in the problematic of tragedy, this is surprising to note. For Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Castoriadis, it was by framing the content of their own times

in the form of tragedy that tragedy, as a philosophical problematic, held power. Philosophy's ongoing dialogue about tragedy does not simply suggest that the Greek tragedies provide some kind of content that can enlarge our own view, as if we had forgotten how to suffer. Rather, it turns upon the conviction that philosophy, the task we now undertake, is vulnerable at every moment to a tragedy of its own. Kant implicitly presents the failure of rationalist philosophy to encompass empirical science in the form of a tragedy; Hegel aims to show that Kant's attempt to unite the rationalist and emerging views of nature was itself tragic; Nietzsche seeks to break open what he saw as the nihilism of morality to a new age of tragedy; Heidegger employs the form of tragedy to argue that the Western obsession with technalized thinking contains the seeds for its own redemption; Castoriadis presents the prevalent intellectual trends of his time—Marxism, structuralism, and phenomenology—as new expressions of an ancient tragedy in order to redirect us to our neighbor and our neighbor's best interest. If anything, these thinkers are united by the intuition that their times were *not* tragic; each manifests the creative power to reimagine and represent their times in the form of tragedy, disrupting the seamless appropriation of established patterns of thinking so that we might discover within the collapse of the given our cognitive limits, thereby opening a larger vision of the world. Understanding tragedy as a living problematic opens the possibility of contemporary forms of tragedy capable of finding new ways of thinking within the inevitable failure of prevailing methodologies.

Cavell is an exception in a generation otherwise hesitant to speak of tragedy as a contemporary phenomenon. He identifies a form of "intellectual tragedy" that permeates human thinking as such. Intellectual tragedy is not a matter of "saying something false" but the inability to accept the "human conditions of knowing."⁹ Cavell does not hesitate to identify this form of tragedy in contemporary philosophy, for he understands philosophy as the fundamental task of accepting human conditions. For Cavell, to speak of ancient Greek tragedy is a kind of triangulation, an indirect way of articulating the tragedy of our own experience. This does not mean that we experience the same tragedy as the Greeks. No one can or will. Rather, Cavell argues that tragedy, were it now written, would show us what the ancient tragedies have always shown us: the reason "*why* we (as audience) are helpless."¹⁰ The reason why we are helpless, as the tragedians recognized, is that "pain and death were in our presence when we were not in theirs." Life (and death) is ineluctably beyond our ability to control or design, because it is *we* who depend upon life. The problem facing us today is

that tragedy will struggle to have an effect while “we absent ourselves” from pain and death. Our technological capacities are so great that we may fool ourselves with the illusion that death itself is our subject. Thus “to make us practical, capable of acting,” we do not need tragedy to purge us of pity and fear, like the Greeks.¹¹ Rather, we need tragedy “to make us capable of feeling them again.”¹²

If we think of tragedy as a thing of the past, then we limit ourselves to historical iterations of tragedy. But if we understand tragedy as an ongoing problematic capable of confronting the failure of modes of thinking, then the project of uncovering this tragedy is transformed: it now finds its task in illuminating the blindness of established and inherited ways of thinking to the audience who subscribe to them. This interruption invites the audience to reflect, to gain an enlarged view that is capable of seeing the elements of life from which they were removed. The work of philosophy inspired by this project is not to solve the problems of a given time but to acknowledge the depth of those problems and, thereby, to transform and vivify the way of thinking of those who populate them.

Ethical complexity

Building from philosophy’s ongoing concern with the problematic of tragedy, one of the driving motivations behind the recent interest in tragedy is the search for an ethics large enough to acknowledge the complexity of a world in which our awareness of conflicting ethical demands exceeds our ability to act. In the present, both our awareness of these demands and our ability to act are perhaps greater than they were for Kant, Hegel, or Nietzsche. Indeed, ethical complexity is endemic to the social fabric of the contemporary. In this context, the contemporary turn to tragedy does not simply search for a way of alerting us to the demands of the ethical; it also shows that our “solutions” often exacerbate the problems they sought to solve. As in Heidegger’s work, tragedy confronts us with the fact that ethical problems cannot be solved by technologized solutions. To approach ethical problems in search of solutions presumes that all the pieces necessary to solve the puzzle are to hand. Conversely, the renewed interest in tragedy recognizes the problems of technical framing and searches for a language that is capable of acknowledging the deep complexities of ethical life.

Bernard Williams puts forward one such attempt in *Shame and Necessity*. He argues that the entire philosophical tradition can be understood as

the systematic attempt to frame life as something morally intelligible in order to give us good news about our moral condition. This project begins with Plato and Aristotle's confrontation with the tragedians, an attempt to make "our ethical relations to the world fully intelligible," subsequently extended by Christianity and the Western philosophical tradition. Williams argues that we are no longer satisfied by this approach, for our contemporary ethical condition "lies not only beyond Christianity, but beyond its Kantian and its Hegelian legacies." Thus we have "an ambivalent sense of what human beings have achieved, and have hopes for how they might live." To find a grammar in which to articulate this condition, Williams turns to Greek tragedy, informing us that the "stark fiction" of the tragedies confronts us with "the horrors" of life and thus refutes the good news of the philosophers.¹³

While Williams highlights the ability of the Greeks to explore matters of ethical complexity beyond the language of good and evil, his Nietzschean account of tragedy does not ultimately provide an alternative. By turning directly to the ancient tragedies for resources with which to confront the mythologies constructed by Kant and Hegel, he reduces philosophy to a caricature of its own tradition. In so doing, he overlooks Kant and Hegel's reflections on moral philosophy in light of natural contingency (to which he is most certainly indebted) and furthermore fails to see that tragedy, like philosophy, searches for integration and renders life as something that can be fought for and valued. Williams' real opponent seems to be a Neoplatonic Christianity in which suffering, contingency, and decay are swept up into a narrative in which all things progress toward a happier end. Thus he identifies the alternative to this view in a kind of presentation that unveils suffering as the result of unintelligent necessity beyond our control.¹⁴ While Williams frames this kind of presentation as a delivery of "bad news" that confronts the "good news" of the philosophical tradition, it is, if anything, a favorable utterance. Nussbaum argues that because it is clear that "most of the starvation and much of the other misery we witness is the result of culpable negligence . . . , metaphysical resignation would again be relatively good news," for it would let us "off the hook." For Nussbaum, the tragedies do not obviate ethical responsibility, rather, they call us to "throw off our laziness and selfish ambition and obtuseness and ask ourselves how the harms we witness might have been prevented."¹⁵ *Pace* Williams, it is not philosophy as such that is the problem, but a particular mode of philosophy, one that ignores our culpability in human suffering. Williams' alternative to the philosophical tradition remains implicated in this problematic mode of thinking; it is insufficient, for we do not require a mere alternative but transformation.

In *The Tragic Vision of Politics*, Richard Lebow provides a different way of approaching ethical complexity to Williams' Manichean dualism in the search for a new, political language modeled on the tragedies that is not only cognizant of ethical complexity but also of responsibility.¹⁶ Lebow focuses on the capacity of tragedy to reframe our use of language. He argues that contemporary discourse in politics and international policy employs language instrumentally, without concern for the original and contingent meanings through which those words first uttered complex realities and questions. Such a language is unable to accept responsibility for any negative consequences that come from its application of technique. Thus it becomes "so impoverished that it almost precludes asking, let alone answering, some of the most important questions about our own interests, the nature of influence and the dangers and opportunities that hegemonic power confronts."¹⁷ Lebow's perceptivity of tragic themes affords him a cogent diagnosis of this phenomenon. Underlying the poverty of contemporary political discourse, he argues, is an inability to recognize that even ethical intentions can yield terrible and unforeseen results. In response to this poverty, Peter Euben argues that "Greek tragedy might . . . help us determine who we are and what we are doing to ourselves and others, while making it clear that such questions are never fully answered or finally resolved."¹⁸ For Euben, modernity must find discursive practices like those expressed in tragedy to acknowledge its regressive moment, that is, it needs a language as capable of opening complex questions as much as of proposing answers. Such a language would be premised on the "belief that order was fragile, that human efforts to control, or even, reshape, their physical and social environments were far more uncertain in their consequences than most leaders and intellectuals recognised, and that hubris—in the form of an exaggerated sense of authority and competence—only made matters worse."¹⁹

While Lebow and Euben make a compelling case for linguistic reform, they hold back from naming contemporary ethical discourse as, like Cavell, an intellectual tragedy. For Lebow, it is not the failure of contemporary discourse that opens us to a new, larger mode of perception. Rather, it is tragedy in the form of ancient Greek drama that "confronts us with our failures and limits, and the disastrous consequence of trying to exceed them."²⁰ Building from Euben, Adrian Poole argues that it is not problems internal to contemporary political discourse that alert us to the need for a new paradigm. Rather, it is ancient Greek tragedy that "diversifies man's universe, severing the certainties that seem to bind human beings together, to make men and women at one with each other, with themselves, with

their world.”²¹ Similarly, Jonathan Badger suggests that Greek tragedy “offers a vision of how communities might cope with the conflicting elements of human nature and avoid the calamity that comes from thoroughly indulging one side or the other.”²² These observations may well be true and identify many valuable lessons in the tragedies. However, focusing exclusively on what can be learned from antiquity undermines the more basic intuition that these thinkers aim to express—that the way of thinking exhibited in mainstream philosophy and political discourse constitutes itself a contemporary form of tragedy.²³ By appealing to the ancient sources rather than presenting this contemporary form, the lessons learned from tragedy become merely intellectual ornaments, while the transformation that follows from the tragedy of one’s own form of life remains unrealized. Identifying the failure of contemporary political discourse—its refusal to recognize the antinomy between the demands of ethics and the practical concerns of politics—requires new forms of tragedy capable of illuminating the prevailing paradigm’s internal blindness—that is, *our* paradigm and hence *our* blindness—thereby inviting its spectators to see themselves as agents in a world that exceeds their ability to understand.²⁴

If philosophy can conceptualize the present tragedy of technalized thinking, it must develop a language able to name its self-created darkness without being claimed by it. It needs a discourse that invites us to acknowledge our guilt, even if it was unknowingly gained. Only through taking responsibility for our actions can we express the possibility of freedom within the natural and cultural orders that bind us. To develop this discourse, philosophy must attend to the tensions between theory and lived experience. The tensions between theory and practice, between our established patterns of thinking and our experiences, are, as Richard Eldridge states, the “enduring material for human tragedy.”²⁵ Without a language informed by the experience of tragedy, the most inspiring visions of the future and the most illustrious promises of technology will fail, relegated to escapist mythologies that merely distract us from the systems in which we are embedded. Such systems cannot be replaced or fixed but simply contested, altered, and transformed.

Universality

While an increasing number of philosophers are turning to tragedy to question current forms of thinking, many of these philosophers also aspire

beyond the recognition of limits in search for a new understanding of universality. Tragedy is seen to express a way of thinking about universality that is neither metaphysically grounded nor limited to a specific cultural context. Rather, it is seen to involve a principle akin to Kant's aesthetic *a priori*—one that resides not in the affirmative serenity of the beautiful but in the disorienting experience of tragedy.

This is evident in Bonnie Honig's *Antigone, Interrupted*, which searches for a new kind of humanism in the collapse of the various humanistic visions of the twentieth century. Honig explores Sophocles' *Antigone* as a lamentation of "sovereignty's excesses and the disappointments of rationalism."²⁶ The power of her reading of *Antigone* lies in the fact that it does not simply excavate the original text for contemporary relevance but identifies the keening cry that Antigone shares with the contemporary world. This cry expresses "a new universalism that might take the place of these discredited contenders: whatever our differences, we are all mortal and we all lament our finitude, since the time of Antigone."²⁷ What is important to note here is that Honig presents modern thought in terms of a tragedy. She argues that in the failure of modern universalist projects we experience a deeper feeling of the whole that opens us to a form of universalism predicated upon our capacity to suffer, to experience loss, and to grieve. This account draws from Rita Felski's reflections on tragedy, which read the "growing self-doubt of philosophy and the questioning of reason, analytical method, and conceptual knowledge" as solicitations to tragedy.²⁸ For Honig, Felski shows us that contemporary philosophy is the task of thinking from within this failure. Philosophy's growing self-doubt contains the possibility for a new vision of humanity united by shared failure and finitude, a unity that cannot be grounded on the capacities of the subject but must be felt in the process of lamentation and grief. Our recognition of the finite edge of contemporary philosophy is itself a cry for a new universal, one that resounds in the profound silence engendered by the failure of the universals past.

Honig's search for a new universalism in the failure of modern projects of self-fashioning returns us to Kant's original task in *Critique of Judgment*: to unite reason and feeling. Kant's project in the third *Critique* is to identify a rational principle within the failure of his previous critical philosophy, not a principle that governs the determination of an object under a concept, but a principle discovered in the search for a philosophic procedure capable of engaging with the contingency of the aesthetic sphere. In Kant's work we find that the acknowledgment of the failure of philosophy leads us to discover a principle that regulates the exercise of judgment, one that directs

our claims about underdetermined experiences to the broader community. A community that aspires to this way of thinking recognizes that there is no theoretical knowledge of political and aesthetic matters and, instead, approaches the political sphere as a domain of collective sense-making. Judgments of beauty, of morality, and of politics become mutual invitations to consider an alternative view, to think from a universal standpoint.

The contemporary search for a new understanding of moral universality is premised on the intuition that tragedy restores a feeling of the whole. This feeling does not give any positive content or “good news” but empowers moral activity in a political sphere where there is no guarantee that reasoned judgments will yield good results. If it is true that tragedy can speak to the allegorical nature of our times, then this search is urgent. Enlarging our view to an awareness of tragedy demands our creative resources and restores the future to its status as an indeterminate reality. Moreover, it reveals that such a future cannot be determined by philosophically defined ends. Rather, it opens the aesthetic sphere as the proper site for the reconciliation of our epistemic and natural selves in creative works and projects that anticipate a future of mutual concern. This vision of collective life invites each citizen to see more than there is in his or her surrounding social order, to see more than there is in his or her fellow citizen, and to see more than there is in his- or herself.

Transforming philosophy

The call for an enlarged imagination, for a way of thinking cognizant of ethical complexity, and for a new understanding of universality leads the ongoing problematic of tragedy into uncharted territory in which it becomes a creative engagement with a present crisis. In this respect tragedy has much to contribute to ward current philosophical thinking, not because it contains important lessons, but because the form of tragedy itself challenges philosophy's exclusive focus upon knowledge and requires of it the more vital task of making sense in common.

The width of tragedy's transformative capacities signals that neither the Greek tragedians nor the post-Kantian Idealists are sole custodians of tragedy. The suggestion that Attic tragedy was animated by a coherent, unified sense of its own form is unhistorical; it elides the turbulent creativity that underpinned the seminal period of tragic art. Similarly, to suggest the antinomy between nature and human action was first felt by Kant

diminishes the historical significance of this problematic, which troubled both Newton and Leibniz a century earlier. What is unique to the tragedians—and extended in Kant's philosophy—is that they refrain from sealing individual agency and nature in separate domains and struggle to express the viability of agency in the natural sphere that is permeated by forces outside the agent's control.

It is in the hope of renewing the power of tragedy to help us feel the viability of human freedom that I have written this book. Two-and-a-half thousand years since the original staging of the tragedies, we remain confronted by our fundamental inability to attune ourselves to our true conditions. By recognizing the failure of philosophy to legislate the fluidity of natural and collective life, Kant's *Critique of Judgment* stands as an exemplary attempt to transform the failure of our endeavors to understand the world—and to understand ourselves—into a way of thinking that is attuned to the differential nature of human action and the agency we find expressed in the natural sphere. Kant's project reveals that it is only when we recognize the failure of philosophy to heal the divide between ideas and experience that we discover that reconciliation does not reside in the philosophic but in the aesthetic, in the creation of new forms in all domains of collective life through practical experimentation, open conversation, and through the arts and sciences. In this way Kant illuminates the essential paradox of tragedy: that only in recognizing the limits of thought do we find thought's true, perpetually new, freedom.

Notes

Introduction

1. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Joshua Billings, *Genealogy of the Tragic: Greek Tragedy and German Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

2. Peter Euben, ed., *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Christopher Rocco, *Tragedy and Enlightenment: Athenian Political Thought and the Dilemmas of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Richard Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests and Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Jonathan Badger, *Sophocles and the Politics of Tragedy: Cities and Transcendence* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

3. Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Julian Young, *The Philosophy of Tragedy: From Plato to Žižek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

4. Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Simon Critchley, *Ethics–Politics–Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought* (London: Verso, 2009).

5. Luce Irigaray, "The Eternal Irony of the Community," in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. G. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Nicole Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman* (New Haven: Harvard University Press, 1991); Bonnie Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

6. Dennis Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks: Tragedy and Ethical Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); David Farrell Krell, *The Tragic Absolute: German Idealism and the Languishing of God* (Bloomington: Indiana University

Press, 2005); Robert Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition and the Death of God: Studies in Hegel and Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Martin Thibodeau, *Hegel and Greek Tragedy*, trans. H. Wilhelm (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013).

7. Krell, *The Tragic Absolute*, 13.

8. Christoph Menke's work stands as an exception to the contemporary acceptance of the death of tragedy. Menke insists that tragedy remains "present" in modernity despite Hegel's attempt to render it a thing of the past, for our experience of ethical irresolvability remains. While Hegel's notion of reflection is aimed at dissolving pre-given determinations, Menke argues that the factual constraint of reflection, that is, the impossibility of resolving the ethical and the aesthetic, makes tragedy both necessary and possible in modernity. Yet in Menke's view, tragedy remains an epochal experience. In the following section I argue that this view ignores the way that philosophers have employed tragedy as a creative way of framing the given to open the possibility of the ungiv- en. Thus it cannot identify the potential significance of tragedy in contemporary philosophy. Christoph Menke, "The Presence of Tragedy," *Critical Horizons* 5, 1 (2010): 201–225.

9. In book 9 of *Poetics*, Aristotle separates tragedy and history as two distinct modes of presentation: history presents the singular, while tragedy presents the universal. Because tragedy attends to the universal, it "is something more philosophic and of greater import than history." Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1451b5–6.

10. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1449b24ff.

11. Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 1990), 29.

12. *Ibid.*, 29–30.

13. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, xiii.

14. *Ibid.*, xiv.

15. *Ibid.*, 68.

16. *Ibid.*, xv.

17. In her later work, Nussbaum puts forward a more complex view of the relation between philosophy and art than I give her credit for here. She argues that, at times, art and ethical theory can be "allies" and not "adversaries." I have limited my comments here to her earlier view, for her reading of Kant and "Kantian philosophy" in her later work remains unable to benefit from Kant's critique of taste in *Critique of Judgment*. I explore the importance of Nussbaum's work on tragedy further in chapter 8. See Martha Nussbaum, "Literature and Ethical Theory: Allies or Adversaries?," *Yale Journal of Ethics* 9 (2000): 5–16.

18. Peter Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, trans. P. Fleming (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1–3.

19. Friedrich Schelling, *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, in *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays (1794–1796)*, trans. F. Marti (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1980), 156–218; 192.

20. Eagleton, *Sweet Violence*, 287.

21. Ibid., 119.

22. Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks*, 276.

23. Ibid., 2–3.

24. Thibodeau argues that the philosophical “preoccupation with Greek tragedy . . . manifests itself for the first time in the writings of the young Schelling.” Thibodeau, *Hegel and Greek Tragedy*, 2.

25. Dubos, in James Moor, *The End of Tragedy according to Aristotle* (Glasgow: Robert and Andrew Foulis, 1763), 11; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Discourse on the Sciences and Arts,” in *The “Discourses” and Other Early Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1–28.

26. See David Hume, “Of Tragedy,” in *Selected Essays*, ed. S. Copley and A. Edgar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 126–132; Moor, *The End of Tragedy according to Aristotle*, 11–15.

27. See Johann Gottfried Herder, “Shakespeare,” in *Selected Writings on Aesthetics*, trans. G. Moore (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 292.

28. In *Genealogy of the Tragic* (8), Billings is critical of Szondi’s harsh separation between Aristotle’s poetics of tragedy and the modern philosophy of tragedy initiated by Schelling. He does not argue against the separation, however, but only against Szondi’s attempt to separate Schelling’s philosophy from Aristotle’s *Poetics*. While I am sympathetic to Billings’ project, I believe that it could be strengthened through examining the way that, through engagement with the life sciences during the eighteenth century, the entire form of philosophy begins to change, collapsing the divisions between philosophy and art in a way that makes Schelling’s achievements possible.

29. The argument put forward by Beistegui and Sparks, Schmidt, Critchley, and Eagleton undermines Kant’s efforts to reconcile the tensions of his critical project in *Critique of Judgment*. This argument draws from the reception of *Critique of Judgment* in French thought, particularly from Jean-François Lyotard’s *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* and Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy’s *The Literary Absolute*. For example, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy argue that *Critique of Judgment* presents the abyss between the two realms of critical philosophy only to leave philosophy in a state of “crisis,” leaving a “gaping hole” that Idealism takes as its starting point (30). While Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy are correct in noting that those who followed Kant’s lead felt compelled to bring his critical move to a more satisfying completion, they overlook the fact that Kant went a long way toward providing a solution himself. This oversight is not unique to Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy but reflects a broader misunderstanding of *Critique of Judgment* that I challenge in chapters 2 and 3. Until recent developments in Kant scholarship, scholars have devoted relatively little attention to the systematic place of the third *Critique* in Kant’s critical corpus. Instead, they have focused on a few isolated sections in order to examine the contemporary relevance of Kant’s treatment of beauty and sublimity. This interpretation takes the mechanical conception of nature Kant advances in the

first *Critique* as his definitive view on the matter, confining his theory of aesthetic judgment to a chapter in the history of aesthetics and his theory of teleology to an unusual moment in the history of natural science.

30. Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, 10.

31. Lacoue-Labarthe, cited in Krüger, *The Tragic Absolute*, 425.

32. Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, 2.

33. Young, *The Philosophy of Tragedy*, 266.

34. "Greek tragedy shows good people being ruined because of things that just happen to them, things that they do not control." Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 25.

35. "Tragic man is constituted within the space encompassed by this pair, *ēthos* and *daimōn*." Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, 37.

36. See Edith Hall, *Greek Tragedy: Suffering under the Sun* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1.

37. Miguel de Beistegui and Simon Sparks, eds., *Philosophy and Tragedy* (London: Routledge, 2000), 7.

38. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, 29.

39. Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks*, 276.

40. Recently, Skinner's new history has been significantly criticized. John Keane's critique is particularly insightful, which identifies three areas of weakness: (1) it is indebted to speech-act theory, which presumes that it is able to reconstruct the intention of the philosopher through historicization; (2) it assumes that language is transparent, meaning that intentional utterances can be enclosed and understood; and (3) it presents the task of history as the recovery of the mentality of past phases of life. In Keane's view, these weaknesses underestimate the underdetermined nature of historical acts. While it is not the concern of this book to address the weakness of Skinner's new theory, I hope to draw from Skinner's methodological approach while avoiding the three weaknesses identified by Keane. See John Keane, "More Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*, ed. James Tully (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 204–217.

41. Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8 (1969): 3–35; 11.

42. *Ibid.*, 50.

43. John Dewey, *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), 33.

44. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1142a25ff.

45. Dewey, *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy*, 33.

46. *Ibid.*

47. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 294.

48. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 170.

49. This approach draws from what Michel Meyer called “problematology”—that is, “the questioning of questioning”—a process that involves both the articulation and interrogation of the discourse that underpins philosophical inquiry. See Michel Meyer, *Of Problematology: Philosophy, Science, and Language*, trans. D. Jamison (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 15.

50. Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination*, 294.

51. Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), 45.

52. *Ibid.*, 46.

53. *Ibid.*, 62.

54. While Kant’s emphasis on the dependency of freedom becomes increasingly apparent in *Critique of Judgment* and his post-critical work, he holds on to the conviction that it is necessary to presume that every “now” is the locus of freedom. In *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, for instance, he claims, “Every evil action must be considered, whenever we seek its rational origin, as if the human being had fallen into it directly from the state of innocence. For whatever his previous behavior may have been, whatever the natural causes influencing him, whether they are inside or outside them, his action is yet free and not determined through any of these causes; hence the action can and must always be judged as an *original* exercise of his power of choice.” Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. A. Wood and G. Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 62–63.

Chapter 1. From Disembodied Soul to Embodied Mind

1. I have modified Guyer and Wood’s translation of *Verlegenheit* from “perplexity” to “embarrassment” in order to highlight the continuity of Kant’s observation with his recognition of another embarrassment of reason in *Critique of Judgment* (5:169). See chapter 2.

2. In Isaac Newton, *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, trans. A. Motte (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), xiv.

3. *Ibid.*, xv.

4. *Ibid.*, 13.

5. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1142a25ff.

6. *Ibid.*, 1140a2–5. See Joseph Dunne, *Back to Rough Ground* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 244.

7. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1142a25ff.

8. Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. H. Bredin (London: Radius, 1988), 23.

9. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Divine Names*, in Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 27.

10. Ibid.
11. Carol P. Oster, "Whose Aristotle? Which Aristotelianism? A Historical Prolegomenon to Thomas Farrell's Norms of Rhetorical Culture," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 41, 4 (2008): 373–397; 385.
12. See Ibid., 379.
13. For a discussion of Averroës' influence on the reception of *Poetics* and tragedy in general in the thirteenth century, see Henry Kelly, *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), especially chapter 1.
14. Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 129.
15. Ibid.
16. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Chicago: William Benton, 1942), 41:1, 383.
17. See Howard Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 48.
18. Aquinas states that in "the natural order, perfection comes before imperfection, as act precedes potentiality; for whatever is in potentiality is made actual only by something actual." Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, 94:3, 730.
19. René Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, trans. V. Miller and R. Miller (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1982), 105, part 3, §45.
20. Ibid., 105–106.
21. Ibid., 106.
22. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Monadology*, in *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. D. Garber and R. Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 79.
23. Ibid., 80, §81, my emphasis.
24. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Correspondence*, ed. R. Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 7.
25. Christian Wolff, *German Metaphysics*, §277, in Lewis Beck, ed., *Eighteenth-Century Philosophy* (New York: The Free Press, 1966), 218–221.
26. Ibid., §370.
27. In the following chapters I suggest that this debate had a significant impact on Kant's argument in the third *Critique*. For example, in §81 Kant observes that we can consider "each organic being generated from its own kind as either the educt or the product of the latter. The system of generatings as mere educts is called that of individual preformation or the theory of evolution; the system of generatings as products is called the system of epigenesis." The tension between these two systems provides the energy underpinning the antimony of teleological judgment.
28. Ina Goy, "Epigenetic Theories: Casper Friedrich Wolff and Immanuel Kant," in *Kant's Theory of Biology*, ed. Ina Goy and Eric Watkins (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 43–60; 43.
29. Peter McLaughlin, "Newtonian Biology and Kant's Mechanistic Concept of Causality," in *Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment: Critical Essays*, ed. Paul Guyer (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 209–217; 210.

30. Buffon's understanding of "natural history" was of particular interest to Kant, for it reframes the Baconian study of nature in a properly "scientific" method. From the 1750s Kant adopts Buffon's distinction between natural history and the description of nature, arguing that Buffonian natural history transforms "the presently overly detailed artificial system for the description of nature into a physical system for the understanding [i.e. a science]." Immanuel Kant, "Of the Different Human Races," *The Idea of Race* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 8–22; 13n. Kant reconsiders Buffon's conception of natural history again in *Critique of Judgment* (§80), though without explicit reference to Buffon.

31. Kant grappled with Buffon's work in the lectures he gave on physical geography in 1775. Buffon's redefinition of the term "natural history" was of particular interest to Kant, for it reframes the study of history through a scientific method. Kant adopts Buffon's new definition of natural history, arguing that it would "transform the currently so diffuse system of academic natural description into a physical system for the understanding [i.e., a science]." Kant, "Von den verschiedenen Racen der Mensch," in John Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 200. Kant reconsiders Buffon's ideas again in *Critique of Judgment* (§80), though without referring to him explicitly.

32. Phillip Sloan, "The Buffon-Linnaeus Controversy," *Isis* 67, 3 (1976): 356–375; 359.

33. In a marginal note to the first introduction to *Critique of Judgment*, Kant criticizes Linnaeus for presuming that his taxonomy of genus and species corresponds to real similarities and difference in the inner nature of things: "Could Linnaeus have hoped to outline a system of nature if he had had to worry that if he found a stone that he called granite, this might differ in its internal constitution from every other stone which nevertheless looked just like it, and all he could hope to find were always individual things, as it were isolated for the understanding and never a class of them that could be brought under concepts of genus and species[?]." For Kant, the significance of Buffon's project is that it identifies the self-regulating power of judgment that is able to draw disparate parts of experience into concepts that do not constitute but regulate experience (CJ 20:216n).

34. Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, "The 'Initial Discourse' to Buffon's 'Histoire Naturelle': The First Complete English Translation," *Journal of the History of Biology* 9, 1 (1976): 133–181; 172.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., 171.

37. Jennifer Mensch, *Kant's Organicism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013), 4.

38. Immanuel Kant, *Kant: Natural Science*, ed. Eric Watkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 9:161–162.

39. In Paul Agutter and Denis Wheatley, *Thinking about Life: The History and Philosophy of Biology and Other Sciences* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 133.

40. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1034b12.

41. Jane Kneller, "Imaginative Freedom and the German Enlightenment," in *Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment: Critical Essays*, ed. Paul Guyer (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 181–198; 182.

42. Alexander Baumgarten, *Aesthetica* (Frankfurt: IOANNAS CHRISTIANI KLEYB, 1750), §1.

43. Gregory Moore, in Johann Gottfried Herder, *Selected Writings on Aesthetics*, trans. G. Moore (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 4.

44. Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, §538, in Brigin Kaiser, "On Aesthetics, Aisthetics and Sensation: Reading Baumgarten with Leibniz and Deleuze," *Esthetica*, www.estheticatijdschrift.nl, viewed on December 15, 2014.

45. As Andrew Bowie notes, after Baumgarten aesthetics becomes "the location in which what has been repressed by a limited conception of reason can be articulated." Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity from Kant to Nietzsche* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 4.

46. See Angelica Nuzzo, "Kant and Herder on Baumgarten's *Aesthetica*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 44, 4 (2006): 577–597; 577.

47. David Hume, "On the Standard of Taste," in *Selected Essays*, ed. S. Copley and A. Edgar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 136.

48. *Ibid.*, 138.

49. David Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature* (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2009), 471.

50. David Hume, "An Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals," in *The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, vol. 4 (London: A. Black & W. Tait, 1826), 376.

51. David Hume, "Of Tragedy," in *Selected Essays*, 126–132; 126.

52. Dubos, in Moor, *The End of Tragedy according to Aristotle*, 11.

53. Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, 642.

54. Hume, "On the Standard of Taste," 138, emphasis mine.

55. Hume, "Of Tragedy," 132.

56. Moor, *The End of Tragedy according to Aristotle*, 11.

57. *Ibid.*, 13–14.

58. *Ibid.*, 17.

59. James Moor, *Essays Read to a Literary Society* (Glasgow: Robert and Andrew Foulis, 1759), 2.

60. Poster, "Whose Aristotle? Which Aristotelianism?" 376.

61. *Ibid.*

62. In chapter 4 of *Poetics*, Aristotle gives three reasons for making art, each of which springs from human nature (while he states that there are only two reasons, he also identifies a third reason for making art, noting the way that art teaches us, namely, imitation): "It is clear that the general origin of poetry was due to two causes, each of them part of human nature. Imitation is natural to man from childhood, one of his advantages over the lower animals being this, that he

is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns first by imitation." Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1448b5–7.

63. Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition* (London: A. Miller, 1759), 28.

64. Edward Young, *Night Thoughts*, in *The Works of the British Poets with Prefaces*, vol. 10, ed. Robert Anderson (London: John & Arthur Arch, 1795), 60.

65. Nuzzo, "Kant and Herder on Baumgarten's *Aesthetica*," 578.

66. Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition*, 12.

67. Herder, "Shakespeare," 291–307; 292.

68. Herder's description of the development of tragedy follows Aristotle's account in book 4 of *Poetics*. Aristotle describes tragedy's development as both an organic process and the product of human innovations. See Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1449a10–31.

69. Johann Gottfried Herder, "The Causes of Sunken Taste among the Different Peoples in Whom It Once Blossomed" [1775], in *Selected Writings on Aesthetics*, 308–334; 334.

70. Herder's understanding of taste confronts Rousseau's critique of the idea that the cultivation of taste might enhance rationality in *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750). Rousseau begins this text with the question of "Whether the Restoration of the arts and sciences has had the effect of purifying or corrupting morals." He argues that "the progress of the arts and sciences has added nothing to our real happiness . . . it has corrupted our morals . . . the arts and sciences are responsible for the moral degeneration of mankind." See Rousseau, *The "Discourses" and Other Early Political Writings*, 1–28.

71. During the early 1780s, Kant wrote several hostile reviews of Herder's work and was particularly critical of his *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784). Kant's most significant argument against Herder is that he fails to give genuine explanation of organic development. While it seems that Kant's argument was partly motivated by his personal resentment toward Herder, his former student, whom he blamed for the poor reception of *Critique of Pure Reason*, it also raises a serious problem: that Herder's analogical reasoning transgresses the limits of reason by articulating things in themselves. According to Kant, Herder builds from knowledge of the world as phenomena to knowledge of the world as noumena. See also Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (New Haven: Harvard University Press, 1993), especially chapter 5. Here Beiser argues that by attacking Herder, Kant inadvertently breaks from his precritical work.

72. Herder, "The Causes of Sunken Taste among the Different Peoples in Whom It Once Blossomed," 312.

73. This new procedure can provide no guarantee that reason will become instrumental in society, for it begins with the acknowledgment that philosophy is unable to legislate all practical affairs. Herder knew this well and thus rejected the

Enlightenment understanding of society as the unfolding of a First Principle in which “all preceding generations [should have been made] properly for the last alone, which is to be enthroned on the ruined scaffolding of the happiness of the rest.” See Johann Gottfried Herder, *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784–1791), trans. W. Churchill (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 75.

Chapter 2. Reflective Judgment

1. See Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, 240.

2. Karl Leonhard Reinhold, *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*, ed. K. Ameriks, trans. J. H. Ebbeler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 42.

3. Karl Ameriks notes that while Reinhold initially fashioned himself as an expositor and disseminator of Kant’s work, he quickly became its critic and reviser after receiving a professorship of philosophy at Jena. In his introduction to the Cambridge translation, Ameriks argues that Reinhold’s *Letters* is “arguably the most influential work ever written concerning Kant,” for it gained Reinhold his professorship and established Jena as the “center of the next generation of German thought and the first professional home of the German Idealists: Fichte, Schelling and Hegel.” In *ibid.*, ix.

4. See Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, ed. and trans., P. Heath and J. Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 94; Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 67–68. Hegel argues that the “Kantian philosophy remains entirely within the antithesis. It makes the identity of the opposites into the absolute terminus of philosophy. . . . On the contrary, the sole Idea that has reality and true objectivity for philosophy, is the absolute suspendedness of the antithesis.”

5. “Letter to K. L. Reinhold, December 28 and 31, 1787,” in Arnulf Zweig, ed. and trans., *Kant: Philosophical Correspondence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 127.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, 128. The “Critique of Taste” took on several forms over the following years and was finally published as *Critique of Judgment* in 1790. Recent scholarship on *Critique of Judgment* goes to great lengths to identify the development of Kant’s argument by dating the various sections of the final text. There is general consensus that the final edition includes a range of edits, including several sections from the initial “Critique of Taste,” which was written in the late summer of 1787, and later revisions that occurred up until its publication in Easter 1790. In this chapter I build on Zammito’s suggestion that giving attention to the “genetic development” of the third *Critique* opens us to a greater understanding of “the major impact of the work on its epoch.” According to Zammito, Kant’s revisions “left vestigial traces in the final product which aroused the speculative interest of his

Idealist successors, who would follow the trail of these neglected possibilities. ” John Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 2.

9. For example, see *CPR* A811/B839ff. In this section Kant is highly aware of the problematic way that his framework separates the ideal world from the sensuous world. He identifies his project as the attempt to reconcile these two orders, which he explains in terms of Leibniz's notion of the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of nature. While for Leibniz these kingdoms dwell together without tension according to God's preestablished harmony, Kant argues that their unity must be established by the activity of reason.

10. In *Critique of Pure Reason* (A138/B177) Kant defines a schema as a “third thing, which must stand in homogeneity with the category on the one hand and the appearance on the other, and makes possible the application of the former to the latter.” Schemata form a bridge between the sensible and ideal orders, providing a direct presentation of a concept.

11. In his essay “Philosophy as Stand-In and Interpreter,” Habermas states that Kant “sets up practical reason, judgment, and theoretical cognition in isolation from each other, giving each a foundation unto itself, with the result that philosophy is cast in the role of the highest arbiter for all matters, including culture as a whole.” See Jürgen Habermas, “Philosophy as Stand-In and Interpreter,” in *After Philosophy: End or Transformation*, ed. K. Baynes, J. Bohman, and T. McCarthy (Boston: MIT Press, 1987), 296–315; 297.

12. *Ibid.*, 298.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*, 277.

15. See Robert Butts, “Teleology and Scientific Method in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*,” *Noûs* 24 (1990): 1–16; 15.

16. Kant identifies two powers of the imagination: reproduction and production. Reproductive imagination is “the faculty of representing in intuition an object that is not itself present” (*CPR* B151). The obvious example of this is the recollection of a visual image that we recall to the mind's eye. This kind of imagination is necessarily not only for knowledge but for the continuity and coherence of experience generally, for “experience as such necessarily presupposes the reproducibility of appearances” (*CPR* A101). The productive imagination, on the other hand, is the very happening of the transcendental synthesis, spontaneously giving itself the image (*Bild*) that it receives. The representations of the imagination do not emerge according to a cause outside of the imagination but are brought into being according to the rules of the understanding. Kant goes as far in *Critique of Pure Reason* to describe the imagination as “a blind but indispensable power of the soul, without which we should have no knowledge whatsoever, but of which we are scarcely ever conscious” (*CPR* A78/B103). The imagination does not purposefully intuit this or that object or image but forms the field of “manifestness” in which

every experience is brought together for the imagination via presentation (*Darstellung*; literally, “placing before”).

17. Butts defines “recalcitrant particulars” as “precisely those particulars for the understanding of which we require *judgment*. We need to determine for ourselves how to classify and to restrict the parameters of understanding for conceptual management of these items.” Butts, “Teleology and Scientific Method in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*,” 2.

18. Kant describes an analogy as “the identity of the relation between grounds and consequences (causes and effects), insofar as the identity obtains in spite of the specific difference between the things or those of their properties that contain in themselves the ground for similar consequences” (*CJ* 5:464n).

19. Kneller, *Kant and the Power of Imagination*, 3.

20. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139a1–17.

21. An example Kant employs in *Critique of Judgment* to highlight the limits of determinant judgment and the importance of reflective judgment is Abraham Trembley’s discovery of the freshwater polyp in 1741 (5:419). For Kant, the significance of Trembley’s discovery lies in the fact that the polyp’s reproductive activity cannot be explained in terms of the established concept of animal genesis, but it pushes the scientific imagination to search creatively for a new idea. When Trembley discovered the polyp, a moss-like organism that lives in freshwater streams, he noted its ability to contract when stimulated and to “walk” by successively attaching its ends to a surface. Given its complex ability to respond to its environment, Trembley concluded that the polyp must be an animal. Yet when cut in half, the polyp did not die but formed two new and complete organisms. The challenge that this experiment posed to preformationism is that the self-formation of the two halves of the polyp cannot be explained by rational principles. It does not express a “motive power” that would adhere to the concepts of the understanding, but a “formative power” that lies beyond our concepts, for it is a power that “communicates to the matter, which does not have it (it organizes the latter)” (*CJ* 5:374). The formative power of the polyp entails that we cannot explain the appearance in purely causal terms. Instead, we are forced to judge it as having a “self-propagating . . . power, which cannot be explained through the capacity for movement alone (that is, mechanism).” Kant’s discussion of polyps gives us a clue to understanding the role of part 2 of *Critique of Judgment*: the basic reason for discussing organisms is that they are objects within our experience that prompt us to consider nature as both mechanical and purposive.

22. See Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom: Essays on Aesthetics and Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 4–5.

23. Kant seems to be particularly critical of Baumgarten’s definition of aesthetics as the “science of all principles of sensuousness,” for it obscures the original meaning of aesthetics he seeks to outline in the first *Critique* (B35/A21). See Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity from Kant to Nietzsche*, 17.

24. Richard Eldridge, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 52.

25. See Béatrice Longuenesse, *Kant on the Human Standpoint* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 275–276.

26. Despite proposing a solution in terms of the supersensible, Kant does not see himself as departing from transcendental philosophy's denial of any cognitive access to noumena. Rather, he argues that the notion of the supersensible is transcendently necessary for consciousness in general. In order to reconcile the lawlessness of nature with the lawfulness of the will, Kant identifies our capacity to *feel* their unity in judgments of beauty and ends. The solution can be neither theoretical nor practical but only a manner of thinking; to use Johann Zammuto's words, it is "subjective, but nevertheless indispensable." Zammuto, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*, 266.

27. Rachel Zuckert, *Kant on Beauty and Biology: An Interpretation of the "Critique of Judgment"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 10.

28. John McFarland, *Kant's Concept of Teleology* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1970).

29. Immanuel Kant, *Kant: Natural Science*, ed. E. Watkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1:228.

30. In §70 of *Critique of Judgment*, Kant gives two different formulations of the antinomy, giving rise to much debate regarding which is the real one. The first relates to reflective judgment, where we have cause to both (1) *judge* material things in accordance with mechanical laws and to (2) *judge* some things by a different law of causality. The second entails the two maxims in the terms of determinative judgment: (1) All generation of material things is possible in accordance with merely mechanical laws, and (2) some generation of such things is not possible in accordance with merely mechanical laws.

31. Kant argues that such a contradiction arises "when for a given conditioned reason demands an absolute totality on the side of the conditions (under which the understanding subjects all appearances to synthetic unity), thereby making the category into a transcendental idea, in order to give absolute completeness to the empirical synthesis through its progress toward the unconditioned" (*CPR* A409/B436).

32. McFarland, *Kant's Concept of Teleology*, 120.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Henry Allison, "Kant's Antinomy of Teleological Judgment," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 30 (1991): 25–42; 25.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Werner Pluhar, "Translator's Preface," in Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. W. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), x c.

37. Gary Banham, *Kant and the Ends of Aesthetics* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 2000), 153.

38. In Zammito's words, Kant concludes that what "understanding could not prove, reason could think, reflection could feel." Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*, 271.

39. Henry Allison, *Essays on Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 170.

40. Dennis Schmidt, *Lyrical and Ethical Subjects: Essays on the Periphery of the Word, Freedom, and History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 17.

41. In *The Fate of Art*, Bernstein argues that Kant's recognition of a mode of judgment without knowledge does not simply provide a secondary, subordinate exercise of judgment to its determinative operation. He argues that Kant identifies the *ground of all judgments*. Bernstein argues that this recognition "almost certainly entail[s] modifications to the central arguments of the first *Critique*." Jay Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1992), 20.

42. In the first two *Critiques*, Kant argues that reason *must* be interested, for otherwise it would leave us in a state of "ceaseless vacillation," meaning that our actions would be dictated entirely by our inclinations and that nature would hold a monopoly on causation. See CPR A475/B503; CPR 119–120.

43. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, 49.

Chapter 3. The Ethical Turn

1. Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*, 333.

2. Ibid.

3. Kant anticipated the inability of revolution to change the way of thinking of the public in his 1784 essay "An Answer to the Question 'What Is Enlightenment?'" However, seeing the early stages of the French Revolution seems to have challenged his thinking. In this essay, he states that a "revolution may perhaps bring about the fall of an autocratic despotism and of an aversive or overbearing oppression, but it can never bring about the true reform of a way of thinking [*Denkungsart*]. Rather, prejudices will serve, like the old, as the leading strings of the thoughtless masses" (61). Instead, Kant argues that the way of thinking of a people can only be changed if the head of a state allows "his subjects to make public use of their reason and to lay publicly before the world their thoughts about the better formulation of this legislation as well as a candid criticism of laws already given" (63). However, Kant writes the final edition of the third *Critique* during the initial and tumultuous years of the French Revolution and suggests that something more basic is required if the public is to be oriented to the public use of reason. He argues that the key to universal judgment is not "the healthy understanding," that is, the ability to think without the tutelage of others. Rather, it is "taste," for "the aesthetic power of judgment rather than the intellectual can bear the name of a

communal sense" (*CJ* 5:295). The task of enlightenment, in this framework, is an aesthetic task, requiring the creative unification of reason and nature in works that open the public to the creative use of their intellectual faculties. Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question 'What Is Enlightenment?'" in *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. J. Schmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 58–64.

4. Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*, 268.

5. In particular, the hope offered in the first two *Critiques* failed to satisfy Reinhold, for instead of showing how reason spontaneously reconciles the two facets of critical philosophy, Kant aims to show that it is necessarily to *presume* that it could be reconciled. Presumably this is why Kant insists in his 1787 letter to Reinhold that, in his "Critique of Taste," he had discovered "elucidations [he] had not expected," that is, a new *a priori* that could ground the theoretical and practical spheres.

6. Jane Kneller argues that adopting a belief in God or immortality does not allow Kant to solve the problem. The moral law demands that we, as *mortals*, bring about the highest good, and our hope to achieve this end depends on our belief in our ability to do so. And yet the notion of a God who will complete this task for us, and that we have infinite time to complete it, is "an admission of the hopelessness of the quest as mere mortals," thus nullifying reason's command ("Imaginative Freedom," 188–189). One assumes that this is why Kant turned away from this argument in *Critique of Judgment* and developed a new approach.

7. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, trans. D. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 39.

8. *Ibid.*, 40, 39.

9. *Ibid.*, 41–42.

10. See Ernst Cassirer, *Rousseau—Kant—Goethe*, trans. J. Gutmann, P. Kristeller, and J. Randall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945), 10.

11. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. C. Mallory (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2012), 470.

12. Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime and Other Writings* [1764] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 96. This citation is from the "Remarks" Kant made on the text in 1764–1765.

13. Immanuel Kant, *Correspondence*, ed. A. Zweig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 94.

14. Kant made no mention of the sublime in the initial proposal for a "critique of taste" in his letter to Reinhold in 1787, and neither do we find it in the editions of the third *Critique* prior to Kant's final drafts in 1789. For Paul Guyer, the late inclusion of the sublime entails that it is "something of an afterthought" in Kant's work. Guyer argues that the sublime does not add anything significant to Kant's argument but in fact provides a "fundamental challenge to it." Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 399.

Yet for Michel Souriau, Giorgio Tonelli, and John Zammito, while the concept of the sublime was not original to Kant's critique of taste, it appears at an important moment in his "cognitive turn," marking a vital development in his thinking (in the spring of 1789). Souriau argues that while the sublime does not appear until "the very latest exposition of Kant's aesthetic thought," it was no afterthought but the most mature idea of *Critique of Judgment*, for it alters the entire landscape of the text. Souriau, *Le jugement réfléchissant*, in Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*, 276. Zammito concurs with Souriau, arguing that it is precisely Kant's notion of the sublime that leads him to his final "ethical turn" of 1790, in which he attempts to seal the realization of freedom in the realm of nature in his understanding of the symbolic, aesthetic sphere of human culture (276). After receiving extensive criticism for marginalizing the importance of the sublime, Guyer corrected his view in the introduction to *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*: "In my earlier work I was rash enough to suggest that Kant's discussions of such topics as the sublime and genius, which appear to be tied only loosely to the architectonic structure of the *Critique of Judgment*, were mere concessions to the literary fashion of his day, thus not essential to his fundamental argument about the conditions under which it is epistemologically justifiable to claim the universal validity of one's pleasurable response to a work of nature or art, the claim that is inherent in a judgment of taste" (2–3).

15. Kant states that at the basis of judgments of the sublime "is a pleasure that arises only indirectly, being generated, namely, by the feeling of a momentary inhibition of the vital powers and the immediately following and all the more powerful outpouring of them; hence as an emotion it seems to be not play but something serious in the activity of the imagination" (*CJ* 5:245).

16. Kant argues that the sublime ultimately affirms the superiority of the mind over nature in the following way: "The astonishment bordering on terror, the horror and the awesome shudder, which grip the spectator in viewing mountain ranges towering to the heavens, deep ravines and the raging torrents in them, deeply shadowed wastelands inducing melancholy reflection, etc., is, in view of the safety in which he knows himself to be, not actual fear, but only an attempt to involve ourselves in it by means of the imagination, in order to feel the power of that very faculty, to combine the movement of the mind thereby aroused with its calmness, and so to be superior to nature within us, and thus also that outside us, insofar as it can have an influence on our feeling of well-being" (*CJ* 5:269).

17. Kant describes the collapse of the understanding as a sacrifice (*Aufopferung*) in the realm of the aesthetic. In the failure of the understanding, reason catches a glimpse of its supersensible freedom and its power to judge with rational concepts such as totality and freedom that exceed representation's scope: "It thereby acquires an enlargement and power which is greater than that which it sacrifices, but whose ground is hidden from it, whereas it feels the sacrifice or deprivation and at the same time the cause to which it is subjected" (*CJ* 5:269). At this moment,

practical reason enters the theoretical under the event of representation's failure and reason's triumph. When imagination is ruptured and all appears to be lost, reason discovers itself to be infinite, at home with itself and above all things. Kant's treatment of the sublime depicts the triumph of reason, reconfirming the self's ultimate transcendence over nature.

18. John Keats, *Letters of John Keats*, ed. S. Gardner (London: University of London Press, 1965), 68.

19. Ibid.

20. Keats's words express the Romantic connection between aesthetics and morality. In this framework Enlightenment and Romanticism are not polar opposites but mutually inform each other. We also find this theme in Kant's essay "What Is Enlightenment" (1784), where Kant argues that "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. . . . 'The motto of enlightenment is therefore: *Sapere aude!* Have courage to use your own understanding!' Immanuel Kant, *Kant: Political Writings*, trans. H. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 54.

21. Donald Crawford, "Kant's Theory of Creative Imagination," in *Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment: Critical Essays*, ed. Paul Guyer (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 143–170; 160.

22. Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*, 330.

23. Friedrich Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. P. Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 225, 228.

24. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, 90.

25. Ibid., 91.

26. Lambert Zuidervaart, "Aesthetic Ideas and the Role of Art in Kant's Ethical Hermeneutics," in *Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment: Critical Essays*, ed. Paul Guyer (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 199–208; 204.

27. Giorgio Tonelli, "Kant's Early Theory of Genius (1770–1779): Part II," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 4, 3 (1966): 209–224; 209.

28. Goodman uses the phrase "world-making" to describe Kant's notion of imagination in *Critique of Judgment*. Kirk Pillow develops this description in the attempt to interpret Kant's notion of imagination as the "hermeneutical imagination." See Nelson Goodman, "Metaphor as Moonlighting," in *On Metaphor*, ed. S. Sacks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 178, and Kirk Pillow, *Sublime Understanding: Aesthetic Reflection in Kant and Hegel* (Boston: MIT Press, 2000), 263.

29. Brigitte Sassen, "Artistic Genius and the Question of Creativity," in *Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment: Critical Essays*, ed. Paul Guyer (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 171–179; 171.

30. It is important to note that Kant's account of "aesthetic ideas" breaks from his understanding of ideas in *Critique of Pure Reason*. In the first *Critique*, "aesthetic" provided the "rules for sensuousness," giving intuitions for the understanding in the

form of schemata (B36n). “Ideas” are the basis of reason and are not available for intuition because they would have to become subordinate to the understanding.

31. Elsewhere Kant elucidates the nature of aesthetic ideas by comparing them with schemata: “Intuitions are always required to establish the reality of our concepts. If the concepts are empirical, the intuitions are called *examples*. If they are pure concepts of the understanding, the intuitions are called schemata” (CJ 5:351).

32. Zuidervaart, “‘Aesthetic Ideas’ and the Role of Art in Kant’s Ethical Hermeneutics,” 206.

33. In Kant’s words, “the image is a product of the empirical faculty of the productive imagination, the schema of sensible concepts (such as figures in space) is a product and as it were a monogram of pure *a priori* imagination” (CPR A141–142/B181). Schemata are best understood as procedural rules for the imagination for providing a concept with its image. They provide a kind of “know-how” of applying concepts. For example, we might have the concept of an orange, but if we are unable to go into a fruit store and select an orange to purchase, then we have no schema of the orange, meaning that we effectively have no knowledge about oranges at all. Kant’s notion of schemata links the theoretical with the practical, just as Aristotle’s notion of practical judgment requires wisdom and deliberation: “if a man knew that light meats are digestible and wholesome, but did not know which sorts of meat are light, he would not produce health, but the man who knows that chicken is wholesome is more likely to produce health.” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1141b19–20.

34. Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, 29–30.

35. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men or Second Discourse,” in *Rousseau: The “Discourses” and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. V. Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 111–229; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, trans. A. Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 467ff.

36. In his essay “What Does It Mean to Orientate Ourselves in Thinking?,” Kant explores our orientation toward the world in terms of feeling: “In the proper meaning of the word, to *orient* oneself means to use a given direction . . . in order to find the others—literally, to find the *sunrise*. Now if I see the sun in the sky and know that it is now midday, then I know how to find south, west, north and east. For this, however, I also need the feeling of a difference in my own subject. I call this a *feeling* because these two sides [right and left] outwardly display no designatable difference in intuition.” Immanuel Kant, “What Does It Mean to Orientate Ourselves in Thinking?,” in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. A. Wood and G. Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3–30; 4.

37. Kneller, “Imaginative Freedom and the German Enlightenment,” 181.

38. Zuidervaart, “‘Aesthetic Ideas’ and the Role of Art in Kant’s Ethical Hermeneutics,” 199.

39. Ibid., 200.

40. Kant's *sensus communis* designates a community that is united by virtue of the enlarged way of thinking shared by its members. The enlarged way of thinking expresses the capacity to recognize what is mere prejudice or superstition and not a basis for universal understanding. To borrow from Gadamer, the *sensus communis* signals the "abstraction of the part-whole relation of the object to its horizon," that is, it allows us to become aware of the contingent character of our aesthetic ideas, thus opening them to the possibility of critique and transformation. Gadamer's notion of the "horizon" plays on Kant's Copernican move, indicating the "range of vision that can be seen from a particular vantage point." We are oriented to our horizon through the *sensus communis*, meaning that we are able to discern between what is essentially communal and what has only survived due to traditional authority. In short, *sensus communis* is the critical, historical space that allows us to assent or dissent from what is commonly held. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2004), 301.

41. Here Kant's work fits most closely with Ernst Cassirer's neo-Kantianism. Cassirer stresses the transformative character of the third *Critique*, arguing that because of Kant's attempt to reconcile the aesthetic and moral dimensions of experience, he "touched the nerve of the entire spiritual and intellectual culture of his time more than any other of his works." Ernst Cassirer, *Kant's Life and Thought*, trans. J. Haden (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 273. This is because it combines symbolic thinking with theoretical philosophy in such a way that reconciles the natural sciences with developments in modern logic. In this attempt, "the critique of reason becomes the critique of culture," for the critical method "seeks to understand and to show how every content of culture, in so far as it is more than a mere isolated content, in so far as it is grounded in a universal principle of form, presupposes an original act of the human spirit." Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, trans. R. Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 80.

42. In §83, Kant's words sound remarkably similar to those of Herder. He attributes to nature a person-like agency, arguing that nature places humankind before constant danger and calamity in order to push it toward recognizing itself as an ultimate end.

43. Zammito, *Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*, 332.

44. In the final pages of *Critique of Judgment* Kant makes a curious observation about a righteous man (such as Spinoza) who seeks to act in conformity to freedom and yet is unable to reach the subjective position in which he can judge nature as a fitting place for the realization of his moral destiny. Such a man remains in the amphibious condition of modernity and cannot find aesthetic unity in his experience. In Kant's words, he "does not demand any advantage for himself from his conformity to this law, whether in this or in another world; rather, he would merely unselfishly establish the good to which that holy law directs all his power."

ers. . . . from nature he can, to be sure, expect some contingent assistance here and there, but never a lawlike agreement in accordance with constant rules (like his internal maxims are and must be) with the ends to act in behalf of which he still feels himself bound and impelled. Deceit, violence, and envy will always surround him, even though he is himself honest, peaceable, and benevolent" (5:452). Such a man sounds surprisingly like Schelling's tragic hero, Schopenhauer's aesthetic observer, or Benjamin's silent sufferer. Unless we can grasp the "final end" of the world in terms of morality, unless we can find a way to judge nature "as if" it were adjusted to fit our moral ends, Kant suggests that we find ourselves in the position of the tragic hero, constantly surrounded by deceit, violence, and envy rather than occurrences that are rendered intelligible to our moral vocation.

45. In this section entitled "On the combination of the beautiful arts in one and the same product," Kant refers to tragedy as a kind of art that combines music, drama, song, and dance, anticipating many of the themes of Wagner's "total work of art" (*Gesamtkunstwerk*). See Richard Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future, and Other Works*, trans. W. Ellis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993).

Chapter 4. Hegel: The Philosophy of Tragedy

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case for Wagner*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967); A. C. Bradley, "Hegel's Theory of Tragedy," in *Hegel on Tragedy*, ed. Anne Paolucci and Henry Paolucci (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962); Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. R. Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2004); Nussbaum, *Fragility of Goodness*; Sebastian Gardner, "Tragedy, Morality and Metaphysics," in *Art and Morality*, ed. S. Gardner and J. L. Bermudez (New York, Routledge, 2002).

2. William Dudley, *Hegel, Nietzsche and Philosophy: Thinking Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Stephen Houlgate, *Hegel, Nietzsche and the Criticism of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Theodore George, *Tragedies of Spirit: Tracing Finitude in Hegel's Phenomenology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); Robert Stern, *Hegelian Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition and the Death of God*; Thibodeau, *Hegel and Greek Tragedy*.

3. Aristotle, *Physics*, 192b15–23. The full citation is as follows: "On the other hand, a bed and a coat and anything else of that sort, *qua* receiving these designations—i.e., in so far as they are products of art—have no innate impulse to change. But in so far as they happen to be composed of stone or of earth or of a mixture of the two, they *do* have such an impulse, and just to that extent—which seems to indicate that nature is a principle or cause of being moved and of being at rest in that to which it belongs primarily, in virtue of itself and not accidentally."

4. See Paul Guyer, "Thought and Being: Hegel's Critique of Kant's Theoretical Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 171–210; 171.

5. Paul Redding, *Continental Idealism: Leibniz to Nietzsche* (London: Routledge, 2009), 100.

6. While I suggest that Hegel employs Kant's regulative understanding of intellectual intuition in order to develop a constructive model of human thought, it is important to note that, against Fichte, Hegel was reticent to use the Kantian terminology of "intellectual intuition." In his *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte's account of intellectual intuition begins with the proposition that the "I posits itself." In the act of intuiting oneself, the philosopher performs the act whereby the self arises for him. "To posit" (*setzen*) means "to be aware of" or "to be conscious of," implying that the essence of I-hood lies in the assertion of one's own self-identity. Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, 94. While he clearly builds on Fichte's self-positing subject, Hegel criticizes Fichte's account of the *Ego* as intellectual intuition for remaining without content. He argues that Fichte's appraisal of Kant's notion of intellectual intuition overlooks the intersubjective dimension of consciousness, thus bestowing critical philosophy with an overly cognitive foundation. See Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 156ff.

7. Redding, *Continental Idealism*, 101.

8. In his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Hegel again notes the significance of Kant's intellectual intuition for completing the critical system. Focusing on Kant's aesthetic categories, Hegel argues that Kant's notion of the beautiful "comes nearer to the concept of the organic and living" (57). He insists that Kant's notion of the beautiful only comes "nearer" to the concept of the organic and living, however, for Kant treats them "only from the point of view of reflection which judges them subjectively." Because Kant's account of aesthetic judgment does not come from the understanding, the faculty of concepts, Kant makes "this dissolution and reconciliation itself into a purely subjective one again, not one absolutely true and actual" (58). Thus Hegel argues that Kant opens us to the hope of a unified system at the very moment he establishes an absolute hierarchy of reality over appearance, noumena over phenomena, being over becoming. Hegel concludes that in *Critique of Judgment* Kant develops the "starting point for the true comprehension of the beauty of art, yet only by overcoming Kant's deficiencies could this comprehension assert itself as the higher grasp of the true unity of necessity and freedom, particular and universal, sense and reason" (60–61). What Hegel means by "starting point" is that Kant brings "the reconciled contradiction [of reason and sense] before our minds" in the unity of "the intuitive understanding" (57).

9. Paul Guyer notes that Hegel's understanding of human cognition as intuitive intellect does not make an "internal criticism" of Kant's theoretical philosophy; that is, he does not argue that certain premises are unsound or that his conclusions

are invalid. Rather, he makes an “external criticism”; Hegel argues that Kant did not realize that his account of intellectual intuition expanded the bounds of critical philosophy. See Guyer, “Thought and Being: Hegel’s Critique of Kant’s Theoretical Philosophy,” 171.

10. Kant’s notion of the Idea famously builds from Plato. He states that Plato used “the expression idea in such a way that we can readily see that he understood by it something that not only could never be borrowed from the senses, but that even goes far beyond the concepts of the understanding (with which Aristotle occupied himself), *since nothing encountered in experience could ever be congruent to it*” (CPR A313/B370, emphasis mine). Yet unlike Plato, Kant argues that the Ideas of reason do not pertain to objects, for they are the metaphysical analogues of physical forces: we do not borrow them from experience but postulate them in order to explain something about experience, such as our demand for unity or our feeling of moral freedom.

11. Robert Pippin notes that Hegel’s account of aesthetics is almost entirely different to Kant’s, for it “largely ignores the question of the logical peculiarities of aesthetic judgments and their possible validity.” Robert Pippin, “The Absence of Aesthetics in Hegel’s Aesthetics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth Century Philosophy*, ed. F. B. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 394–418; 396.

12. See Aristotle, *De Anima*, 412a1ff. For Aristotle, there is no inner/outer contrast between form and matter. Rather, the form is causally responsible for the organization of the outer parts, meaning that it is fully expressed in the matter: “matter is potentiality, form actuality” (412a10).

13. The verb *begreifen* means “to comprehend” and comes from *greifen* (“to grasp” or “to seize”). The noun *Begriff* means both “concept” and “conception” in the sense of “ability to conceive.” As Michael Inwood notes, Hegel’s notion of *Begriff* is neither exclusively universal nor a representation, nor does it refer to the characteristics that objects have in common. Rather, it entails that conceptual thought can capture empirical, emotional, and religious experience. See Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 58f.

14. Because Hegel understands beauty in terms of Ideas, and Ideas as detached from nature, natural beauty does not play a role in Hegel’s aesthetics as it does for Kant. Kant argues that in judgments of beauty nature leaves “traces” that speak of an undergirding unity of the theoretical and practical domains, a supersensible realm that is external to human cognition. For Hegel, on the other hand, nature is spiritless (*geistlos*) and natural beauty has no philosophical significance: “What is higher about the spirit and its artistic beauty is not something merely relative in comparison to nature. On the contrary, spirit is alone the true, comprehending everything in itself, so that everything beautiful is truly beautiful only as sharing in this higher sphere and generated by it. In this sense the beauty of nature appears only as a refraction of the beauty that belongs to spirit, as an imperfect incomplete

mode, a mode which in its substance is contained in the spirit itself" (LA 2). Thus art does not imitate nature, for natural beauty is a mere refraction of the beauty that belongs to Spirit. While artworks might contain an aspect of nature to the extent that they are composed of sensible material such as stone and sounds, what makes them works of art is that their materiality is spiritualized in a composition produced by human consciousness to express the Idea.

15. Julian Young notes that while the action of the tragic heroes differentiates them from static figures in sculpture, tragic heroes are not entirely different to sculpture. Unlike comic heroes who have rich inner lives, tragic heroes represent only one emotion or ethical power, as does a figure of sculpture. See Young, *The Philosophy of Tragedy*, 116.

16. Hegel argues that modern art is limited because it is no longer linked intuitively to the ethical life of a community. Once art is detached from the immediate ethical conditions of a society, it becomes art "transcending itself as art," a manifestation of the dissatisfied life of art as a continuous tradition. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind: Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, trans. W. Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), §561 and §562.

17. The ambiguous summit of philosophy over the lower shapes of Spirit is expressed in Hegel's famous assertion that "the Owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of twilight." G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. A. Wood, trans. H. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 28.

18. Aristotle argues that "the structure of the best tragedy should be not simple but complex and one that represents incidents arousing fear and pity—for that is peculiar to this form of art." In tragedies that follow this structure, the hero's suffering is instrumental in the process of reversal and recognition; recognition occurs *through* suffering. Yet while the hero suffers, the pity and fear are ultimately a subjective response in the *spectators* through the same "structure and incidents of the play." Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452b–1453b.

19. Aristotle's aim in *Poetics* is to identify the "proper pleasure" of tragedy so that higher tragedies can be distinguished from those that are not written to instruct but to entertain. Poets who aim to entertain, Aristotle explains, "merely follow their public, writing as its wishes dictate. But the pleasure here is not that of tragedy." This critique is significant for Hegel, for it provides a way to identify the "highest" tragedies without appealing to a tragic essence. See Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1453a30f.

20. Ibid.

21. Apart from *Poetics*, Aristotle uses *katharsis* only once. In this context it is employed to describe a medical purgation. Yet as Gerald Else notes, reading *Poetics* with this definition in mind is problematic, for it "presupposes that we come to the tragic drama (unconsciously, if you will) as patients to be cured, relieved, restored to psychic health. But there is not a word to support this in the *Poetics*, not a hint that the end of drama is to cure or alleviate pathological states. On the contrary it is evident in every line of the work that Aristotle is presupposing normal auditors,

normal states of mind and feeling, normal emotional and aesthetic experience. ” Else argues that Aristotle’s usage of *katharsis* gives us very little to go on, meaning that we must explore the use of the word in its context in order to derive its meaning. See Gerald Else, *Aristotle’s Poetics: The Argument* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 225–226, 440.

22. This is because Aristotle’s use of imitation (*mimesis*) does not refer to a speculative practice of imitating reality, as does Plato. Rather, it refers to a process of learning about the world. Aristotle explains that imitation “is natural to man from childhood . . . he is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns first by imitation.” Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1448b5–7.

23. This definition of tragedy seems to capture only a small set of tragedies, such as Sophocles’ *Antigone* and Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*. Some scholars have pointed out that Hegel notes a second kind of tragedy that encompasses a wider range of the tragedies such as *Oedipus Rex*. For Hegel, such tragedies involve a conflict between (a) the right of the protagonist to own what he *knows* he has done and (b) the course of actions that have been ordained by the gods that have been *unknowingly* carried out. Both forms of tragedy dramatize the irreconcilable collision between the monstrous forces at play on human lives and the spontaneous freedom of the human will. In this chapter I focus on Hegel’s first theory of tragedy, as the second theory does not feature until his *Lectures on Aesthetics* and is not integrated into his philosophical project in the same way as the first theory. See Houlgate, *Hegel, Nietzsche and the Criticism of Metaphysics*, 182ff.

24. In Hegel’s early essay “Natural Law,” the primary example of tragedy is not Sophocles’ *Antigone* but Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*, the final tragedy of the Oresteia Trilogy. *Eumenides* ends in a climactic court scene, where the Eumenides (the ancient, brutish powers of the law, standing for the dead Clytemnestra) and Apollo (the god of light and justice, standing for Orestes) stand before the people of Athens. The Athenians vote equally on each side, meaning that Athena must step in to arbitrate. Athena restores Orestes and reconciles the people to the Eumenides, she is enthroned above the acropolis, and the people are pacified. In *Natural Law*, Hegel concludes his reflections on the scene with the following: “Tragedy consists in this, that ethical nature segregates its inorganic nature (in order not to become embroiled in it), as a fate, and places it outside of itself; and by acknowledging this fate in the struggle against it, ethical nature is reconciled with the Divine being as the unity of both. ” In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, however, Hegel ceases to refer to the *Eumenides* as the primary example of tragedy and draws extensively from *Antigone*. This change is important, for while the *Eumenides* refers to the reconciliation of ethical life as “Divine being” that occurs in the drama itself, requiring a *deus ex machina* in the form of Athena’s arbitration, in *Antigone* the reconciliation occurs in the spectators as the bearers of ethical life. Moreover, Hegel considers the reconciliation in *Antigone* as a rational process; through this reconciliation, the spectators come to see the suffering of Antigone and Creon was necessarily given the fracture of ethical

life. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Natural Law: The Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law, Its Place in Moral Philosophy, and Its Relation to the Positive Sciences of Law*, trans. T. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 104–105.

25. Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 376.

26. Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition and the Death of God*, 128.

27. *Ibid.*, 11.

28. In *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant argues that it is necessary to preserve the separation of the theoretical from the practical domain in order to maintain the purity of freedom. Freedom requires that individuals are genuinely responsible for the choices they make, meaning that their choices must be spontaneous: an “act of itself, without requiring to be determined to action by an antecedent cause” (A533/B561). Freedom depends on the will, “a power of self-determination, independently of any coercion through sensuous impulses” (A534/B562). Thus, as William Dudley notes, Kantian freedom is “metaphysical,” for it requires both a noumenal locus of causality outside experience and a theoretical order of moral law, both of which must be autonomous from the established code of ethics in a given society if it is to be truly free. Dudley, *Hegel, Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 5.

29. Pippin, “The Absence of Aesthetics in Hegel’s Aesthetics,” 396.

30. In Hegel’s terms, the “court of world judgement is not to be viewed as the mere might of spirit.” G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science*, trans. J. Stewart and P. Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), §164.

31. Bradley, “Hegel’s Theory of Tragedy,” 379.

32. *Ibid.*, 374. More recently, Nussbaum describes Hegel’s reading of tragedy in terms of reconciliation as the ultimate progressive fantasy of modernity, for it is grounded on the belief that “the very possibility of conflict or tension between different spheres of value will be altogether eliminated.” Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 68.

33. Gardner, “Tragedy, Morality and Metaphysics,” 243.

34. Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition and the Death of God*, 174.

35. *Ibid.*, 168.

36. Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006), 115.

37. *Ibid.*, 116.

38. Hegel, *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science*, 306–307.

39. *Ibid.*, 307–308.

40. Robert Bernasconi, “‘The Ruling Categories of the World’: The Trinity in Hegel’s Philosophy of History and the Rise and Fall of Peoples,” in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. S. Houlgate and M. Baur (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 315–331; 318.

41. Hegel, *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science*, 308.

42. Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition and the Death of God*, 364.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid., 366, my emphasis.

45. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel develops the image of being “at home in the world” in the section on “spirit.” Being at home in the world signals a position in which spirit “does not seek its satisfaction outside of itself but finds it within itself, because it is itself in this equilibrium with the whole” (277). It signals spirit’s both *being* satisfied and its being able to give account for *why* it is satisfied.

46. One of Williams’ key motifs in his defense of Hegel’s theory of tragedy is Hegel’s reference to history as a “slaughterhouse.” G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), §24. Williams considers Hegel to be deeply aware of irrational suffering, for he held that history is only rational insofar as right is preserved. Yet as I argue presently, Williams’ argument turns on a prior commitment to a notion of right that cannot be defended by Hegel’s theory of tragedy. Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition and the Death of God*, 372.

47. By reconsidering the notion of representation that is rejected by Hegel (and also by Nietzsche and Heidegger), I am entering controversial terrain. Yet as I claim in my discussion of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Castoriadis, to reconsider representation does not require that we return to a Cartesian standpoint, that is, one that considers the veracity of the mind’s representations as a judge considers a legal argument. In the introductory essay to *Beyond Representation* entitled “From Representation to *Poiesis*,” Richard Eldridge calls for a similar reconsideration of representation and yet concludes that representation must be replaced with *poiesis*. When considered in light of Aristotle’s *poiesis*, Eldridge states that representations (such as artworks) “both *represent* subjects and their interests, and yet also fail to do so: as products of imaginative power calling to ways of cultural life not yet in being, they lead to an ongoing and unmasterable historicity of human life.” While Eldridge suggests that understanding cognition as *poiesis* ought to lead us *beyond* representation, for it destroys the Cartesian question of the correspondence of representation and reality, in this book I try to show that it leads us to reconsider the original intention of Kant’s appraisal of representation and, in particular, how Kant’s representational aesthetics provided a way of navigating the tragedy of philosophy. As Eldridge himself notes, for both Aristotle and Kant, representation cannot be distinguished from *poiesis*. Thus it is always more than the given. See Richard Eldridge, ed., *Beyond Representation: Philosophy and Poetic Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 8.

48. John Pizer, *Toward a Theory of Radical Origin: Essays on Modern German Thought* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 56.

49. Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin, or, Toward a Revolutionary Criticism* (London: Verso, 1981), 5.

50. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. B. Lewalski (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 1. 26.

51. Hippocrates describes the *facies hippocratica* as follows: “the nose sharp, the eyes sunken, the temples fallen in, the ears cold and drawn in and their lobes distorted, the skin of the face hard, stretched and dry, and the colour of the face pale or dusky . . . and if there is no improvement within [a prescribed period of time], it must be realized that this sign portends death.” See G. Lloyd and J. Chadwick, ed. and trans., *Hippocratic Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), 170–171.

52. See Michel Haar, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, trans. M. Gendre (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 156.

53. Benjamin responds to the overbearing comprehensiveness of Hegel’s philosophical discourse by noting that tragedy can be instrumental to the transition from daemonic to philosophical thinking: “the tragic relates to the daimonic as does paradox to ambiguity. In all the paradoxes of tragedy . . . ambiguity, the hall-mark of the daimons, is dying away” (*GT* 109).

54. See Hegel’s discussion of the judgment of the concept in *Science of Logic*, 657ff.

55. Redding, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*, 184.

56. In this move Hegel departs sharply from Kant, for, as Redding notes, Hegel’s emphasis on singularity entering the judgment of the concept reveals how “the evaluative judgment can be thought of as establishing a genuine cognitive relation to an independent object.” Ibid.

Chapter 5. Nietzsche: Tragic Philosophy

1. I have altered Kaufmann’s translation of “Der ungeheuren Tapferkeit und Weisheit” from “extraordinary courage and wisdom” to “monstrous courage and wisdom” in order to highlight the link between *ungeheure* and the orders of magnitude in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*.

2. Nietzsche, “Attempt at Self-Criticism,” in *BT*, 19. Perhaps *The Birth of Tragedy*’s controversial popularity is exactly why Nietzsche attempts to trace the connections between his first book and his later work in the 1886 preface. He was to publish *Beyond Good and Evil* in the same year, 1886, which might explain his attempt to identify the argument of *The Birth of Tragedy* as his first attempt to move beyond the traditional morality, that is, “beyond good and evil.”

3. While it is widely accepted that Schopenhauer is Nietzsche’s greatest influence in *The Birth of Tragedy*, there is much debate over the extent to which Nietzsche affirms Schopenhauer’s philosophy of art. For scholars such as Walter Kaufmann and Béatrice Han-Pile, *The Birth of Tragedy* employs the basic concepts of Schopenhauer’s philosophy of art in order to go beyond his inability to break from Kantian morality. For others, such as Julian Young and Nunobiki, Nietzsche fashions a veneer of criticism over an account of metaphysics that is essentially borrowed from Schopenhauer.

4. Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 131.

5. Julian Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 27.

6. Nuno Nabais, *Nietzsche and the Metaphysics of the Tragic*, trans. M. Earl (New York: Continuum, 2006), 25.

7. *Ibid.*, 21.

8. Kant had an extremely low view of music, counting it as the lowest of the beautiful arts, or better, as the highest form of agreeable art. This is because he deemed music as a matter of emotion rather than cognition: "If one estimates the value of the beautiful arts in terms of the culture that they provide for the mind and takes as one's standard the enlargement of the faculties that must join together in the power of judgment for the sake of cognition, then to that extent music occupies the lowest place among the beautiful arts (just as it occupies perhaps the highest place among those that are estimated according to their agreeableness), because it merely plays with sensations" (*CJ* 5:329). Kant's objection seems to be that music affects us before we are able to judge. Elsewhere he complains about music being played at dinner parties because it is "supposed to sustain the mood of joyfulness merely as an agreeable noise, and to encourage the free conversation of one neighbor with another without any one paying the least attention to its composition" (*CJ* 5:305). On another occasion he compares music to jokes, suggesting that neither concerns cognition but are merely sentimental (*CJ* 5:332).

9. Nabais, *Nietzsche and the Metaphysics of the Tragic*, 25.

10. Béatrice Han-Pile, "Nietzsche's Metaphysics in *The Birth of Tragedy*," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, 3 (2006): 373–403; 379.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Jacob Burckhardt, *History of Greek Culture*, trans. P. Hilty (London: Constable, 1963), vi.

13. *Ibid.*, 207.

14. Even in Nietzsche's later writings he pays tribute to Burckhardt as "the most profound student of Hellenism alive today" (*TI* 227).

15. See also *BT* 60. The god Silenus is said to have taught that life is not worth living, and his teaching is often cited as the paradigm of pessimism. It is reiterated in several forms in the tragedies, most notably in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* (ll. 1224–1226): "Never to have been born is best, / But if he must see the light, the next best / Is quickly returning whence he came." In *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer regularly echoes Silenus' wisdom in statements such as follows: "But as regards the life of the individual, every life-history is a history of suffering, for, as a rule, every life is a continual series of mishaps great and small, concealed as much as possible by everyone. . . . But perhaps at the end of life, no man, if he were sincere and at the same time in possession of all his faculties, will ever wish to go through it again" (*WR I* 324).

16. Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future, and Other Works*, 35.
17. "Letter from Leibniz to Arnauld, 23 March 1690," in Leibniz, *Correspondence*, 7.
18. Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future, and Other Works*, 77.
19. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. H. Tomlinson (London: The Athlone Press, 1983), 12.
20. Ibid., 11.
21. Han-Pile, "Nietzsche's Metaphysics in *The Birth of Tragedy*," 379.
22. Nietzsche cites this passage in *Birth of Tragedy*, 102.
23. Despite the disagreement in scholarship over Nietzsche's relation to Schopenhauer, most scholars agree that Nietzsche reproduces Schopenhauer's metaphysics of music. Michel Haar, however, is an exception to this rule. Haar argues, "Contrary to what [Nietzsche] sometimes seem to say, or what he would have the reader believe," he is "radically opposed" to Schopenhauer's doctrine of music. Haar seeks to draw our attention to the fact that while Schopenhauer views music as a copy of a deeper reality, namely, the will, for Nietzsche music "is being itself, not its first reproduction." Haar's argument is problematic on two fronts. First, it flies against Nietzsche's explicit references to music as a "copy of the will itself . . . representing *what is metaphysical*, the thing in itself" (BT 100). Second, it attempts to graft Nietzsche's argument in *The Birth of Tragedy* into his greater corpus, failing to recognize that Nietzsche's views on the topic are not uniform throughout his intellectual development. See Haar, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, 173–174.
24. Julian Young argues that Nietzsche's basic motive in writing *The Birth of Tragedy* was to contribute to "Wagner's seemingly quixotic but ultimately successful project of raising enough money to build his own, custom-designed opera house in Bayreuth." Thus his argument is that tragedy "is being 'reborn' in the shape of Wagner's music-dramas." See Young, *The Philosophy of Tragedy*, 169.
25. In identifying the essence of tragedy as the spirit of music, Nietzsche departs from his understanding of tragedy in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. In this fragmented text Nietzsche explores tragedy not in the art of the tragedians but in the shared experience of Athenian cultural life in the fifth century BCE wherein the former myths that bathed collective life with meaning ceased to be immediately compelling, opening the Greek world to the need to philosophize in order to elucidate the meaning of experience. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. M. Cowan (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1962).
26. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870s* (New York: Humanities Press, 1979), "The Philosopher," § 37.
27. Nabais, *Nietzsche and the Metaphysics of the Tragic*, 42.
28. Han-Pile asserts that Nietzsche "teaches us that far from being 'horrific,' 'life is at the bottom of things, despite all the changes of appearances, indestructibly powerful and pleasurable' (BT: §7, 59)." Han-Pile, "Nietzsche's Metaphysics in *The Birth of Tragedy*," 392.

29. Ibid., 382. Han-Pile later describes the Dionysian as illusion and links it to the sublime, unaware that she ultimately parallels Nietzsche with Schopenhauer's metaphysics of art: "Therefore, it is essential to the definition of the Dionysian that it should be illusory. The illusion does not come from the sublime glorification of individuation, as in the case of the Apollonian, but from another form of sublime, the symbolic annihilation of the individual, which allows the Dionysian actor to metaphorically re-live the God's agony and bliss" (384).

30. Nietzsche's use of "monstrous" (*ungeheure*) here is important. In §26 of *Critique of Judgment* Kant distinguishes between the sublime (*Erhaben*) and the monstrous (*Ungeheure*) as two orders of magnitude. Left without the aid of concepts, aesthetic estimation of magnitude aims to comprehend that which exceeds the capacity of the imagination to comprehend. That which is "great beyond any standard of sense" but remains subject to the estimation of the mind is judged to be 'sublime'" (*CJ* 5:256). It is the *almost* too great, thus expanding the imagination beyond the limits of the understanding and heightening its awareness of its ability to estimate or judge in a way that is analogous to the infinitude of reason. However, that which by its magnitude "annihilates the end (*Zweck*) which its concept constitutes" is judged to be "monstrous" (*CJ* 5:253). It is *too* great and thus destroys any return to ethical or teleological sensibility. Its greatness is so vast that any "end" or "purpose" is utterly destroyed by the excess of raw nature that is encountered. While something that is almost too great gives us the illusion of danger, we judge it to be sublime for we find it to be an occasion for the more forceful release of reason. When something is too great, on the other hand, we are thrown into terror at the hands of *real* danger and reason is overruled by our inclination for survival.

31. John Sallis, *Crossings: Nietzsche and the Space of Tragedy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 40.

32. See Czeslaw Milosz, *The Witness of Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 81. The disintegration to which Milosz refers "had already taken place in the nineteenth century, though it was under the surface and only observed by a few."

33. Peter Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), xix. While Rosenzweig draws from Jewish sources, and it is clear that his experience of being a "Jewish German" shapes his argument in the text, he states that *The Star of Redemption* is "not a 'Jewish book' . . . for while it deals with Judaism, it deals with it no more comprehensively than it deals with Christianity, and barely more comprehensively than it deals with Islam. Nor does it claim to be a philosophy of religion. . . . Rather it is merely a system of philosophy." Franz Rosenzweig, "The New Thinking," in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, trans. and ed. P. Franks and M. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 109–139; 110.

34. Along with Rosenzweig, Walter Benjamin, Herman Hesse, Paul Celan, and Martin Heidegger can also be understood in this way: finding Nietzsche to be the ineliminable starting point of grappling with the aesthetic origin of value, and yet insufficient to outline a new way of thinking about value.

35. I have modified Galli's translation of "des vermisst sich die Philosophie" from "philosophy has the audacity" to "philosophy deceives itself" in order to capture the crucial sense of *vermisst sich*, which implies self-deception.

36. Benjamin agrees with Rosenzweig's portrayal of Nietzsche as a tragic hero, arguing that Nietzsche remains ethically silent, attempting "to raise himself up amid the agitation of that painful world" (*GT* 110). It seems that Rosenzweig's account of Nietzsche enabled Benjamin to argue in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* that Nietzsche is "offered up as the first fruits of a new humanity" (107). This new humanity, Benjamin argues, must search for a new ethical paradigm out of the ashes of the tragic hero who defied the previous system of ethics and was destroyed by it.

37. Han-Pile, "Nietzsche's Metaphysics in *The Birth of Tragedy*," 379.

38. In the 1886 preface Nietzsche recognizes the difficulty he faced in his original attempt to unveil the vacuity of language through language. Upon reflection he states that it "should have been *sung*, this 'new soul'—and not spoken!" (*BT* 20). The limitations of *The Birth of Tragedy* to enact its own truth became apparent, significantly undermining the entire project of the text. Nietzsche had argued in the original edition, "Language, as the organ and symbol of appearance, can never and in no case disclose the deepest interiority of music" (55). This is to say that what needs to be known in the work of art cannot be told but must be displayed and enacted. Thus from the outset of the book Nietzsche alerts us to the fact that something new is needed if the book is to live up to its observations—a move that radically distances him from Hegelian dialectics. See Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks*, 195–198.

39. Ultimately, the difference between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer's solutions to suffering, as Young points out, is that Schopenhauer's spectator makes a "double denial." While Nietzsche's Dionysian spectator identifies with the world-will and finds aesthetic solace, Schopenhauer's spectator finds this stance ultimately repulsive. His spectator denies both the Apollinian and the Dionysian reality in favor of identifying with something beyond the will, something that refuses to be representable. Schopenhauer condemns the creator for failing to be constrained by moral ideals, while Nietzsche chooses only to judge the creator by aesthetic standards, calling the spectator to see that humans are merely the means to the artist-god's production of a cosmic epic. Young concludes that Nietzsche embraces the creative activity of an amoral artist-god by rejecting that which humanizes us. See Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art*, 54.

Chapter 6. Heidegger: Greek Tragedy

1. See Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger*, xxi. Scholars have been tentative to draw connections between Heidegger and Rosenzweig due to Heidegger's controversial engagement with his Jewish colleagues. For example, Karl Löwith denies any

real engagement between the two, for he seeks to emphasize the difference between Heidegger's Nazism and the alternative response to the problems of modernity found in Rosenzweig's work. Gordon, on the other hand, argues that we must connect the two *precisely because of* Heidegger's involvement with National Socialism. Gordon's work is part of an increasing body of literature aimed at elucidating the influence of Rosenzweig's new thinking on Heidegger's fundamental ontology. See Karl Löwith, "M. Heidegger and F. Rosenzweig, or, Temporality and Eternity," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 3, 1 (1942): 53–77; Jules Simon, *Art and Responsibility: A Phenomenology of the Diverging Paths of Rosenzweig and Heidegger* (New York: Continuum, 2011).

2. In an essay written in the final months of his life, Rosenzweig identified Heidegger as an advocate of his new thinking. See Franz Rosenzweig, "Transposed Fronts," in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, trans. P. Franks and M. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 146–152.

3. In his final interview with *Der Spiegel*, Heidegger states that what he had learned since giving his *Introduction to Metaphysics* lectures in 1935 is that "the planetary movement of modern technology is a power whose history-determining magnitude can hardly be overestimated." Martin Heidegger, "Only a God Can Save Us," in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. R. Wolin (Boston: MIT Press, 1993), 91–116.

4. Reiner Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, trans. R. Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 515.

5. See Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. R. Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), part 3.

6. Tom Rockmore, *On Heidegger's Nazism and Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life*, trans. A. Blunden (New York: Basic, 1993); Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, trans. E. O'sers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); James Phillips, *Heidegger's Volk: Between National Socialism and Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

7. See particularly the reviews made by Paul Hockenos and Richard Wolin upon the release of the notebooks: Paul Hockenos, "Release of Heidegger's 'Black Notebooks' Reignites Debate of Nazi Ideology," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 60, 23 (February 28, 2014); Richard Wolin, "National Socialism, World Jewry, and the History of Being: Heidegger's Black Notebooks," *Jewish Review of Books* 5, 2 (2014). In several passages of *Black Notebooks*, most of which are dated after 1939, Heidegger links his critique of Western metaphysics to the popularist National Socialist ideology of race. He refers to the Jewish gift for "calculation" (*Rechnung*), linking it to his critique of the "empty rationality and calculability" (*leeren Rationalität und Rechenfähigkeit*) of Western metaphysics. The "rootlessness" of the Jews, Heidegger argues, drives the "world-historical task" of modernity to its homogeneous, technological end. See Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2014), vol. 96, pp. 46, 243.

8. The lecture courses to which he refers are those given during the decade after his resignation from the rectorate of Freiburg University in 1934. See Walter Biemel and Hans Saner, eds., *The Heidegger-Jaspers Correspondence 1920–1963*, trans. G. Aylesworth (New York: Humanity Books, 2003), 189. Heidegger makes a similar claim fifteen years later in the famous *Der Spiegel* interview. See Heidegger, “Only a God Can Save Us,” 101.

9. Véronique Fóti, “Heidegger, Hölderlin, and Sophoclean Tragedy,” in *Heidegger toward the Turn: Essays on the Work of the 1930s*, ed. J. Risser (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 163–186; 163.

10. In his letter to Jaspers, Heidegger claims that with Nazi spies in his lectures and constant monitoring of his work he did everything possible to confront the regime. He states that “no one dared to do what I did.” Biemel and Saner, eds., *The Heidegger-Jaspers Correspondence 1920–1963*, 189.

11. Jacques Taminiaux, “Heidegger on Values,” in *Heidegger toward the Turn: Essays on the Work of the 1930s*, ed. J. Risser (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 225–242; 225–226.

12. Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* 94, 115.

13. Jacques Taminiaux, *Poetics, Speculation, and Judgment: The Shadow of the Work of Art from Kant to Phenomenology*, trans. M. Gendre (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 163–164.

14. John Caputo, “Heidegger’s Revolution: An Introduction to the *Introduction to Metaphysics*,” in *Heidegger toward the Turn: Essays on the Work of the 1930s*, ed. J. Risser (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 53–74; 53.

15. Heidegger refers to the importance of Hegel’s notion of history in the epilogue to “Origin of the Work of Art” (78). Here he situates his work in relation to Hegel’s claim that art “no longer counts for us as the highest manner in which truth obtains existence for itself.” Martin Heidegger, “Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001), 15–86.

16. This is what Heidegger calls *Ge-stell*, “framing,” in “The Question Concerning Technology.” See Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. D. Krell (London: Routledge, 1978), 283–318; 285.

17. Parmenides, *Fragments: A Text and Translation*, trans. D. Gallop (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 56.

18. Heidegger’s attack on Aristotle’s determinative understanding of *phusis* is the subject of much criticism. See Alexander Di Pippo, “The Concept of *Poiesis* in Heidegger’s *An Introduction to Metaphysics*,” *Thinking Fundamentals*, vol. 9 (Vienna: IWM Junior Visiting Fellows Conferences, 2000). Alternatively, in *Heidegger and Aristotle*, Walter Brogan defends Heidegger’s reading of Aristotle, commending the phenomenological reading of Aristotle’s concept of nature. Walter Brogan, *Heidegger and Aristotle* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

19. As Mark Sinclair notes, Heidegger draws our attention to the connection between *phusis* and *phaos* (light): “as light, *phusis* is presence, the event of presence

which allows each and every being to show itself in its own particular shape and figure.” Mark Sinclair, *Heidegger, Aristotle and the Work of Art: Poiesis in Being* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 145.

20. Heidegger argues that Aristotle established one of the basic misunderstandings of nature in Western philosophy by contrasting *phusis* with *art*. In the Western tradition nature is not just one of two equal terms (nature and freedom, nature and spirit, nature and law, and so on) but “holds the position of priority.” In this view, freedom, spirit, law, and all potentialities of human being that are held to be “non-natural” are, in fact, determined by nature, finding their existence in relation to a ground that defines their parameters. Alternatively, Heidegger attempts to locate a notion of *phusis* that does not determine the beingness (*ousia*) of beings but that provides a space for beings to emerge. Martin Heidegger, “On the Essence and Concept of *Phusis* in Aristotle’s *Physics*,” trans. T. Sheehan, in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 228–229; 241.

21. David Tabachnick, “Techne, Technology and Tragedy,” *Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology* 7, 3 (2004): 95.

22. *Ibid.*, 96.

23. Friedrich Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory*, trans. T. Pfau (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 89.

24. Julian Young quoting Heidegger, “Lectures on Hölderlin’s *Germanian*,” in *The Philosophy of Tragedy: From Plato to Žižek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 209.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Jules Simon argues that Heidegger’s introduction of the threefold means that his “turn” is not simply a “turn to” art and aesthetics but, following his resignation from the position of rector, a “turn from” political engagement. The aim of Heidegger’s new task of thinking, according to Simon, is “the setting into motion of an aesthetic process of political change made possible by the gift of the poet, Hölderlin, translated by the philosopher, Heidegger, and which could be taught to the politician, Hitler.” Simon, *Art and Responsibility*, 14–15.

27. Young, *The Philosophy of Tragedy*, 209.

28. Here it seems that Heidegger aims to complete his proposal in §74 of *Being and Time* (435–436) to realize the destiny of the people (*Volk*) by embracing their “impotence” and taking a stance of resolute “passivity.”

29. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140a.

30. Robert Bernasconi, “The Greatness of the Work of Art,” in *Heidegger Toward the Turn*, ed. J. Risser (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 95–118; 110.

31. *Ibid.*

32. See Hubert Dreyfus, “Heidegger on the Connection between Nihilism, Art, Technology and Politics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. C. Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 345–372; 360.

33. Martin Heidegger, "What Are Poets For?," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001), 87–140; 114.

34. Julian Young suggests that Heidegger not only sees Antigone as the reckless daring one, he also sees *himself* as the daring one. In other words, Heidegger projects his own resistance to the National Socialist movement onto Antigone: "In contrast to the discussion in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, the *Ister* discussion would seem to bear this out, for Creon is, surely, Hitler, and Antigone is, *inter alios*, Heidegger himself." While Young may well be correct, his interpretation detracts some of the potency of Heidegger's reading of Antigone as the portrayal of *Being*. If he is right—and there is certainly evidence in the text to support his claim—*Hölderlin's Hymn* would be a self-justifying text bordering on narcissism, connecting Heidegger's own sense of calling to the movement of *Being*. Young, *The Philosophy of Tragedy*, 228.

35. Heidegger's desubjectified view of art in *Hölderlin's Hymn* anticipates the understanding of art he develops in the late 1940s. In "Origin of the Work of Art," for example, Heidegger argues that the significance of Greek tragedy lies in the alternative medium of presentation it provides to technologized representation. He states that tragedy puts the old gods of inherited values and the new gods of emerging linguistic practices into battle in order to transform a people's thinking. Through this presentation the people are unhabituated from a homely fitting-together of beings in such a way that what is "holy and what unholy" is put up for decision (42). In this way the work of art shows its "workly character," for it sets "up a world" (43). A world is not a mechanical or scientific "collection of the countable or uncountable, familiar and unfamiliar things that are just there," for a world cannot be an object before us. Rather, Heidegger cryptically explains that the "*world worlds*," meaning that the world is that which provides the conditions of possibility for objects to appear in a particular way. The "workly" character of the artwork means that this disclosure becomes historical, meaning that the artwork gives "things their look" and "to men their outlook on themselves" (42).

36. Hannah Arendt, "Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought," in *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954*, ed. J. Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 428–447; 433.

37. Ibid.

38. Jaspers' critique of disengaged speculation echoes the broader critique of philosophy he develops in *Basic Philosophical Writings*: "High in the mountains on a vast rocky tableland the philosophers of each generation have been meeting since time immemorial. From there one can gaze down onto the snow-capped mountains and, still deeper, into the valleys inhabited by man." Jaspers states that it is not difficult to gain access to this plain, yet it requires that one leave their familiar surroundings—their home—in order to learn from these heights "what authentically is." Moreover, it requires that one chooses isolation over community, for "no one can be encountered there." Jaspers need hardly add that this "was the way it was with

Heidegger.” Karl Jaspers, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, trans. E. E. Heidegger, L. E. Heidegger, and G. P. Heidegger (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1986), 511–512.

39. Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 36.

40. Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Heidegger as Rhetor: Hans-Georg Gadamer Interviewed by Ansgar Kemmer,” in *Heidegger and Rhetoric*, ed. D. G. Ross and A. Kemmer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 47–64; 51.

41. Reinier Schürmann, “Ultimate Double Bind,” in *Heidegger toward the Turn: Essays on the Work of the 1930s*, ed. J. Risser (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 243.

42. Ott, *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life*, 244.

Chapter 7. Castoriadis: Tragedy and Self-formation

1. See Warren Breckman, *Adventures of the Symbolic: Postmarxism and Democratic Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 97.

2. Cornelius Castoriadis, “The Logic of Magmas and the Question of Autonomy,” in *The Castoriadis Reader*, trans. and ed. D. Curtis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 290–318; 292.

3. Cited in *IIS* 223.

4. While Cantor’s naïve set-theory was superseded by the set-theories of Bertrand Russell and Gottlob Frege, and then by the category theory of Samuel Eilenberg and Saunders Mac Lane, Castoriadis is concerned with the epistemological implications of the initial impulse of set-theory, suggesting that axiomatic set-theory and category theory build from Cantor’s approach. In Castoriadis’ view Russell’s paradox turns set-theory in a direction that is more concerned with the coherence of logical systems than the epistemological insight that grounds the project of set-theory. In the attempt to avoid the paradoxes of set-theory, mathematicians such as Russell were led to “various systems of axioms, which, at the price of an ever more unwieldy formalism, have suppressed the clear intuitive content of Cantor’s definition, and this . . . without any genuine gain on the formal level” (see “The Logic of Magmas and the Question of Autonomy,” 292). In other words, while Russell argues that naïve set-theory is paradoxical, and thus incomplete, Castoriadis considers this incompleteness to alert us to the groundlessness of *any* attempt to classify sets. The significance of set-theory is that it returns mathematics to transcendental (i.e., Kantian) questions, for they explore the condition of the possibility of schematic and topological experience rather than the objects of experience themselves. Russell’s response to Cantor’s paradoxes ultimately occludes this trajectory. See Robert Goldblatt, *Topoi: The Categorical Analysis of Sets* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, 1984), chap. 1. Goldblatt’s use of Kantian language to explain the

development of category theory from Cantor's initial naive set-theory highlights the epistemological dimensions of this turn.

5. Jeff Kloogler, *Castoriadis: Psyche, Society, Autonomy* (Boston: Brill, 2009), 206.

6. Castoriadis' argument also resonates with Kurt Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, which problematizes the justification of axiomatic statements in a logical system, meaning that no system can be complete. According to Du Sautoy, Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem "was not the death knell of mathematics. Gödel had not undermined the truth of anything that had been proved. What his theorem showed was that there's more to mathematical reality than the deduction of theorems from axioms." We might say that Gödel cleaves open the possibility of that which exceeds the given, showing that mathematics is by necessity incomplete. His emphasis on mathematical "demonstration" resonates with Castoriadis' understanding of tragedy, for it implies that one cannot grasp the Incompleteness Theorem by being "told" but by being "shown." In other words, we can only grasp the limits of systems through discovering them on our own. See Marcus Du Sautoy, *The Music of the Primes: Why an Unsolved Problem in Mathematics Matters* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), 182.

7. See Alex Callinicos, *Trotskyism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); Agnes Heller and Ferenc Fehér, *The Grandeur and Twilight of Radical Universalism* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1991).

8. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. F. Lawrence (Boston: MIT Press, 1987), 330. Habermas is particularly critical of Castoriadis' notion of the "primary stratum" upon which a society has to "rely." He argues that it denies any sense of accountability between individual judges, for "social praxis disappears in the anonymous hurly-burly of the institutionalization of every new world from the imaginary dimension."

9. While the contrasting positions of constructionism and logicism lie outside the scope of my present concern, it is important to note that Castoriadis' emphasis of the groundlessness of sets stands against the logicism of Russell and Whitehead. Russell's Paradox entails that Cantor's naive set-theory is *logically* paradoxical. Following Russell's discovery, set-theory was faced with the problem of revising the intuitive (or naive) ideas about sets and reformulating them in such a way as to avoid inconsistencies. For Castoriadis, the drive of logicism is to heal the abyss between thought and reality, thus occluding the challenge that Cantor's set-theory poses to our understanding of logic.

10. Here I draw especially from Castoriadis' discussion of "leaning on" (*Anlehnung*) in chapter 5 of *IS*. Castoriadis develops the notion of *Anlehnung* as "the leaning of the social-historical institution on the natural stratum; this institution itself as the simultaneous and indissociable institution of identity relations and of non-identity significations; finally, the philosophical problematic that emerges, at an articulating moment, in society and the philosophical negation/affirmation of the

social-historical world of significations” (*IIS* 186). The normative claim in step (3) is underdeveloped in this section of *IIS*. Thus I also draw from Castoriadis’ work on tragedy discussed later in this chapter, where he builds a normative account of cognition based on the recognition of limits.

11. See, for instance, Hannah Ginsborg, *The Normativity of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), and Béatrice Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge: Sensibility and Discursivity in the Transcendental Analytic of the “Critique of Pure Reason”* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

12. Cornelius Castoriadis, “Done and to Be Done,” in *The Castoriadis Reader*, trans. and ed. D. Curtis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 361–417; 366.

13. John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 9ff.

14. The notion of second nature extending the given has become a central issue in biosemiotics and niche construction. These emerging fields of inquiry are dedicated to outlining the capacity of organisms to modify their environment and thereby influence their own and other species’ evolution. For example, biosemiotics focuses on the semiotic phenomena in animals and other living creatures. According to Marcello Barbieri, the study of the genetic code suggests that “the cell itself has a semiotic structure, and the goal of biosemiotics [is] the idea that all living creatures are semiotic systems.” Marcello Barbieri, ed., *Introduction to Biosemiotics: The New Biological Synthesis* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), ix. According to Kendal, Tehrani, and Odling-Smee, niche construction begins by rejecting the standard view of evolution that examines the modification of environments and instead focuses on the “organism-induced changes in selection pressures in environments.” It differs from standard evolutionary theory in “recognizing that the evolution of organisms is co-directed by both natural selection and niche construction.” Jeremy Kendal, Jamshid J. Tehrani, and John Odling-Smee, “Human Niche Construction in Interdisciplinary Focus,” in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of Biology* 366, 1566 (2011): 785–792; 785.

15. Cassirer, *Kant’s Life and Thought*, 3.

16. Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 428a1–2, 16–17. Aristotle’s account of *phantasia* in *On the Soul* can be understood as an explicit response to Plato’s understanding of the term. In book 10 of *Republic* (602c–d), Plato examines the *techné* of the poet, which he deems to imitate appearances rather than things as they are (thus it is thrice removed from the truth). Socrates asks what kind of faculty (*dunamin*) it is to which imitation makes a special appeal. His answer is the faculty of appearances (*phantasia*). This faculty makes it possible for a man to appear to be small when he is distant and larger when he is close, for a stick to appear straight when out of water and bent when it is plunged half into a stream. While *phantasia* can deceive us, the *techné* of measuring, numbering, and weighing can help with these illusions by allowing *phantasia* to give way to the measuring part of the soul (*logisamenon*). When this faculty has done its measuring, it will often produce results that con-

tradict *phantasia*. Because it is impossible for the same thing (the soul) to hold two contradictory judgments about the same thing, Socrates deems that the part that judges according to the appearance must be different from that which judges with the measurement. He concludes that *logisamenon* is better than *phantasia*, for it does not represent nonbeing. Contrary to Plato, Aristotle argues in *On the Soul* that *phantasia* and *logisamenon* are not two types of judgment, one inferior to the other, and neither is judgment *a posteriori* to sense impression. Rather, he suggests that one is judging and the other sensory, meaning that both operate harmoniously and immediately: "It is clear then that imagination (*phantasia*) cannot, again, be opinion (*doxa*) plus sensation, or opinion mediated by sensation, or a blend of opinion and sensation; this is impossible both for these reasons and because the content of the supposed opinion cannot be different from that of the sensation (I mean that imagination must be the blending of the perception of white with the opinion that it is white: it could scarcely be a blend of the opinion that it is good with the perception that it is white): to imagine is therefore (on this view) identical with the thinking of exactly the same as what one perceives non-incidentally" (428a24–428b1). Against Plato's account of *phantasia* as an inferior kind of judging, Aristotle argues that appearance cannot be equated with judging sensibly, because something appearing in a certain way (a man appearing to be small when he is far away) is compatible with a contemporaneously held true belief that he is in fact six feet tall. By arguing that *phantasia* is not opinion plus sensation, Aristotle is able to say that a man's being six feet tall can still be true given one's perception of him being small. See Kimon Lycos, "Aristotle and Plato on 'Appearing,'" *Mind* 73 (1964): 496–514.

17. Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 429a3–4.

18. Castoriadis' topology of the imagination builds from Cassirer and Arendt, both of whom focused on Kant's distinction between imagination's reproductive and productive dimensions. See Cassirer, *Kant's Life and Thought*, 314, 323; Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 79. Cf. Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Discovery of the Imagination," in *World in Fragments*, trans. D. Curtis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 213–235. What Castoriadis finds important in Cassirer's reading of Kant's productive imagination is that it emphasizes the representational character of thinking without requiring access to a theoretical sphere of ontological fixity. For Cassirer, Kant is not concerned with determining the being of the theoretical sphere but with elucidating that which "reason brings forth entirely out of itself," as Kant states in the preface of the first edition of *Critique of Pure Reason* (Axx). For Castoriadis, Cassirer's reading of Kant does not return us to the Fichtean absolute ego that contains all of reality. Rather, Cassirer views Kant as an idealist about *form*, not matter, for he argued that the existence of an empirical world, a "natural strata," is logically necessary given the synthetic orientation of the transcendental categories. While there is nothing outside Fichte's absolute I, Kant never ceased from arguing

that without an “object” (*Gegenstand*, that which “stands against” us) there is nothing to protect imagination from fantasy.

19. See Castoriadis, “The Discovery of the Imagination,” 213–245.

20. *Ibid.*, 214.

21. Similarly, Arendt argues that Kant’s refusal to accept the ontological status of productive imagination means that it is never fully productive. Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 79.

22. Castoriadis’ notion of the radical imagination confronts that put forward by Heidegger. Heidegger conceives of imagination as that which “brings-forth” (*poiesis*), “producing” or “drawing into presence” what was already there. Alternatively, Castoriadis argues that the imagination creates *ex nihilo*, linking it closely with *poiesis* but with an essential distinction. He models the imagination’s creativity not on the Greek artificer who gives determinate form to the preexisting materials of the world—who “brings-forth”—but on the creativity of the Hebrew God who creates the world from nothing. Thus the very structures, meanings, and ideas in the imagination are created by each imagination in every case. See Cornelius Castoriadis, *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, trans. K. Soper and M. Ryle (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1984), 83.

23. Cornelius Castoriadis, “Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary,” in *The Castoriadis Reader*, trans. D. Curtis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 319–337; 321.

24. *Ibid.*, 321–322.

25. *Ibid.*, 322.

26. François Dosse, *History of Structuralism*, vol. 2, trans. D. Glassman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 115.

27. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. A. Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 252–253.

28. *Ibid.*, 253.

29. Cornelius Castoriadis, “Logic, Imagination, Reflection,” in *World in Fragments*, trans. D. Curtis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 246–272; 267.

30. See Castoriadis, “The Discovery of the Imagination,” 231–245; Vrasidas Karalis, “Aristotle and Us: Some Observations on His Philosophical Language,” *Thesis Eleven* 93 (2008): 36–51; 47.

31. Cornelius Castoriadis, “Institution of Society and Religion,” *Thesis Eleven* 35 (1993): 5.

32. Cornelius Castoriadis, “The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy,” in *The Castoriadis Reader*, trans. & ed. D. Curtis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 267–290; 269; Castoriadis, “Institution of Society and Religion,” 5.

33. Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Rising Tide of Insignificance*, trans. anon., unpublished ms., 318.

34. Cornelius Castoriadis, “Aeschylean Anthropogony and Sophoclean Self-Creation,” in *Figures of the Thinkable*, trans. H. Arnold (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 1–20; 4.

35. Cornelius Castoriadis, "Fenêtre sur le chaos," in *Fenêtre sur le chaos* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2007), 153.

36. As Suzi A dams notes, such a method is able to attend to that which cannot "be predicted, predicted or deduced from its precedents." Suzi A dams, *Castoriadis's Ontology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 50.

37. Castoriadis, "The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy," 286.

38. Ibid., 273, 284. Elsewhere Castoriadis describes tragedy as a "window into the abyss, into chaos, and the shaping of this abyss—it is the moment of sense, the creation of a cosmos by art itself." Castoriadis, "Fenêtre sur le chaos," 153.

39. Ibid., 153.

40. In *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (343), Castoriadis resists the structuralist understanding of the functional categories of human thought with the notion of "magma," a concept he uses to describe "that from which one can extract (or in which one can construct) an indefinite number of ensemblist organizations but which can never be reconstituted (ideally) by a (finite or infinite) ensemblist composition of these organisations." The fluidity of magma supports all ensemblist organizations but cannot be understood structurally, for it is always in motion and radically indeterminate.

41. Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977), 8.

42. See Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. E. Vieu, revised trans. D. Vieu (London: Penguin, 2003), 11.409–411.

43. When Agamemnon returns he addresses his countrymen as follows: "First, Argos, and her native gods, revive from me / The conqueror's greeting on my safe return; for which, / As for the just revenge I wrought on Priam's Troy, / Heaven shares my glory." Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, ll. 810–813.

44. Castoriadis, "The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy," 286.

45. Castoriadis, "Aeschylean Anthropogony and Sophoclean Self-Creation," 13.

46. Ibid. This is Castoriadis' literal translation. More poetically it is rendered "Great honour is given / And power is given to him who upholdeth his country's laws / And the justice of heaven." Sophocles, *Antigone*, in *The Theban Plays*, trans. E. Vieu (London: Penguin, 1947), ll. 354–356.

47. Haemon opens his confrontation with Creon with the following monologue: "Father, man's wisdom is the gift of heaven, / The greatest gift of all. I neither am / nor wish to prove you wrong, / Though all man might not think the same as you do. . . . Surely, to think you own the only wisdom, / And yours the only word, the only will, / Betrays a shallow spirit, an empty heart. / It is not weakness for the wisest man / To learn when he is wrong, know when to yield." Ibid., ll. 689–693, 710–713.

48. Castoriadis, "Aeschylean Anthropogony and Sophoclean Self-Creation," 13.

49. Immanuel Kant, "Reflexionen zur Anthropologie," 897, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 15:392, in Andrew Wood, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 40.

50. Castoriadis, "Done and to Be Done," 370.

51. In "Fenêtre sur le chaos," Castoriadis argues that this origin of philosophy is not unique to Presocratic thought, but that we find it equally in Plato and Aristotle. Plato identifies that the proper foundation of philosophy is *thaumazein*, a sense of wonder, and Aristotle argues that it is due to *thaumazein* that humans "both now begin and at first began to philosophize." *Thaumazein* discloses a mode of thought that begins from our activity of seeing (*theorein*), where a particular "this" (a form of *idein*) throws us into an amazed stupor, into wonder. However, it is before Plato and Aristotle that the idea of *phusis* arose as a matter of question. Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. R. Waterfield (London: Penguin, 1987), 155d; Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982b12–13. See Raymond Prier, *Thauma Idesthai: The Phenomenology of Sight and Appearance in Archaic Greek* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1989), 85.

52. Homer mentions *phua* only once. See Homer, *The Odyssey*, 10.302–303.

53. See Michel Foucault's exploration of the Sophists in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History," in *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Random House, 1984), 76–100.

54. Cornelius Castoriadis, "Phusis and Autonomy," in *World in Fragments*, trans. D. Curtis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 331–341; 331.

55. Ibid.

56. Cornelius Castoriadis, "Value, Equality, Justice, Politics: From Marx to Aristotle, from Aristotle to Us," in *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, trans. K. Soper and M. Ryle (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1978), 260–339; 326.

57. Castoriadis, "Done and to Be Done," 373.

58. Ibid.

59. See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 70b9–72b4, and *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1142a25f.

60. Aristotle, *Physics*, 194a28–29.

61. Ibid., 192b21. In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle also refers to this interpretation, describing *techné* as the "principle of movement in something other than the thing moved" and *phusis* as the "principle of movement in the thing itself." Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1070a6–7.

62. Castoriadis, "Phusis and Autonomy," 335.

63. Heidegger, "On the Essence and Concept of *Phusis* in Aristotle's *Physics*," 228–229.

64. Ibid., 241.

65. Ibid., 229.

66. As Suzi Adams notes, one of Castoriadis' many criticisms of Heidegger can be traced to "Heidegger's interest in and reliance on a *phusis* that was pre-nomos, and

hence an acceptance of a certain kind of a *top-down* unveiling (or “disclosure”) rather than a *bottom-up* institution (or “creation”).” Adams, *Castoriadis’s Ontology*, 20.

67. Castoriadis, “*Phusis* and Autonomy,” 340.

68. Ibid. Autonomy understood in terms of Kantian heteronomy is, in one sense, a kind of voluntarism, for it recognizes the underdetermined nature of appearances and reconceives the origin of concepts in human activity. Yet this kind of voluntarism is nothing like the theological voluntarism of seventeenth-century philosophers such as Hobbes and Descartes. Hobbes outlined a naturalistic account of voluntarism by identifying that political legitimacy is underpinned by the “irresistible power” of God that is the underlying source of his *absolute* right of dominion. Descartes outlined a form of voluntarism in which there are no truths antecedent to God’s will. Castoriadis’ understanding of autonomy, on the other hand, entails that while the being of nature cannot provide a definitive ground to social significations, this does not entail that our significations are without any sense of order. Rather, in the same way that all living beings give themselves law and yet remain forever underdetermined, human significations are lawful but without law. See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), chap. 31, §5, p. 237; Redding, *Continental Idealism*, 27.

69. Following his encounter with Rousseau, Kant never ceases to argue for the dignity of every individual intelligence. In *Critique of Pure Reason* (B859), for example, he states that “in regard to the essential ends of human nature the highest philosophy cannot advance further than is possible under the guidance which nature has bestowed even upon the most ordinary understanding.” See Dieter Heinrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, ed. D. Pacini (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 55.

70. For Kant, this loss is not really a problem, for it “touches only the monopoly of the schools and in no way the interest of human beings” (*CPR* Bxxxii).

Conclusion

1. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 166.

2. Eagleton, *Sweet Violence*, ix.

3. Ibid., 287.

4. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, xvf.

5. Schmidt argues that tragedy provides a language through which to question the fundamental assumptions of “metaphysics, Christianity, sciences, technology, as well as the influence of these upon the real formations of cultural and political life.” Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks*, 4.

6. Ibid., 27.

7. Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 74.

8. Kalliopi Nikolopoulou, *Tragically Speaking: On the Use and Abuse of Theory* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), xxiii.

9. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 19, 454.

10. Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 346.

11. *Ibid.*, 347.

12. *Ibid.* Kierkegaard made a similar argument in response to Hegel's death of art thesis in the attempt to reenergize the presence of tragedy in modern philosophy. For Kierkegaard, tragedy is just as pertinent in modernity as in ancient times, "just as weeping is still natural to all men alike." While the content of tragedy shifts to meet the demands of new generations, the form of tragedy retains the ability to confront our self-understanding with the truth that our choices are both active *and* passive: "If the individual is entirely without guilt, then is the tragic interest nullified, for the tragic collision is thereby enervated; if, on the other hand, he is absolutely guilty, then he can no longer interest us tragically." The greatest inhibition a society can make to its capacity for autonomy, Kierkegaard argues, is to obscure either side of this paradox and thus heal the tension. Our ability to perceive tragedy is the "aesthetic sense with regard to human life"; it is what "the divine love and mercy are"; it is "like a mother's love." He concludes that one cannot be truly be happy until one can see tragedy. Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, trans. F. Swenson and L. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), 113–118.

13. Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 166.

14. *Ibid.*, 152.

15. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, xxxvii.

16. Lebow's work in political theory has sparked a new discourse that explores international relations in terms of tragedy. See the recent collection of essays entitled *Tragedy and International Relations*. Editors Toni Erskine and Lebow focus on two insights of tragedy for contemporary international relations: "its enduring capacity to warn us of the dangers of power and success and its problematization of all conceptions of justice." The first has to do with the concept of hubris and its consequences: "The more powerful and successful an actor becomes, the greater the temptation to overreach in the unreasonable expectation that it is possible to predict, influence, or control the actions of others and by doing so gain more honour, wealth, or power." Thus hubris is a kind of "category error" occurring when "powerful people make the mistake of comparing themselves to the gods, who have the ability to foresee and control the future." The second is concerned with our understanding of justice: tragedies "present the audience with contrasting and equally valid conceptions of justice," demonstrating that "our conceptions of justice are parochial, not universal, and are readily undercut by too unwavering a commitment to them." Toni Erskine and Richard Lebow, eds., *Tragedy and International Relations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 9.

17. Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics*, xiii.

18. Euben, *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory*, vii. Euben suggests that the tragedies express a language capable of responding to Horkheimer and Adorno's warning in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that if "enlightenment does not assimilate reflection on this regressive moment, it seals its own fate. By leaving consideration of the destructive side of progress to its enemies, thought in its headlong rush into pragmatism is for feigning its sublimating character, and therefore its relation to truth." See Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. E. Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), xvi.

19. Euben, *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory*, x.

20. Ibid.

21. Adrian Poole, *Tragedy: Shakespeare and the Greek Example* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 2.

22. Badger, *Sophocles and the Politics of Tragedy*, 1.

23. Similarly, Nikolopoulou argues that the German idealist tradition occludes the "core principles of the tragic world" by understanding tragedy in terms of the *philosophy* of tragedy. Thus they miss "the *political* force with which tragedy once addressed the *actual* nature of conflict and the importance of human responsibility." While Nikolopoulou makes a legitimate attack on some of the central themes advanced by the German idealists, she strips them from their historical experience of rupture and dislodges their thought from the political order to a theoretical realm of philosophical speculation. Thus she fails to see that the turn to tragedy in German philosophy, while certainly problematic, contains resources with which to transform the way of doing philosophy. Nikolopoulou, *Tragically Speaking*, xxiv.

24. Euben comes closer to this task than Lebow and Badger, arguing that any philosophy of tragedy must recognize the "tragedy of tragedy." He identifies a dynamic in contemporary policy that could blow out into a contemporary tragedy: "single-minded devotion to security and order is likely to increase the intensity of the disorder it will eventually bring about, whether it is the return of the repressed or blowback." To elucidate this point, Euben turns to the scene in Euripides' *Bacchae* wherein the king's attempts to rein in the god and his intoxicated worshippers not only fails but exacerbates the situation, escalating the original problem to its extreme. *Bacchae* calls for a complex form of self-awareness, for it acknowledges the dangers of excess at the same moment that it recognizes that the enforcement of limits cannot stem the tide of excess. What Euben does not note is that the task of presenting new forms of tragedy is not simply to anticipate the "return of the repressed" in the forms of ethical life but to present this tragedy *before* it leads to self-destruction. Tragedy is not the collision of ethical powers in lived experience, independent of human presentation. That is simply a disastrous event. Tragedy is a way of framing our commitment to contradictory ethical powers in such a way that alters our orientation to them. Peter Euben, "The Tragedy of Tragedy," in

Tragedy and International Relations, ed. T. Erskine and R. Lebow (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 86–96; 86.

25. Richard Eldridge, “How Can Tragedy Matter for Us?,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52, 3 (1994): 287–298; 296.

26. Bonnie Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1.

27. Ibid.

28. Rita Felski, ed., *Rethinking Tragedy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 1.

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In *The Tragedy of Philosophy* Andrew Cooper challenges the prevailing idea of the death of tragedy, arguing that this assumption reflects a problematic view of both tragedy and philosophy—one that stifles the profound contribution that tragedy could provide to philosophy today. To build this case, Cooper presents a novel reading of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. Although this text is normally understood as the final attempt to seal philosophy from the threat of tragedy, Cooper argues that Kant's project is rather a creative engagement with a tragedy that is specific to philosophy, namely, the inevitable failure of attempts to master nature through knowledge. Kant's encounter with the tragedy of philosophy turns philosophy's gaze from an exclusive focus on knowledge to matters of living well in a world that does not bend itself to our desires. Tracing the impact of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* on some of the most famous theories of tragedy, including those of G. W. F. Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and Cornelius Castoriadis, Cooper demonstrates how these philosophers extend the project found in both Kant and the Greek tragedies: the attempt to grasp nature as a domain hospitable to human life.

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